THE SHIP SAILS ON

NORDAHL GRIEG

[redacted] UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
[redacted] 7645

THE
[redacted]
LIBRARY
[redacted]
[redacted]nion, New Yor[redacted]

DISCARD

The Ship Sails On

Other

Important Novels from the North

on the Borzoi List

By *KNUT HAMSUN*

Growth of the Soil

Mysteries

By *J. ANKER LARSEN*

The Philosopher's Stone

Martha and Mary

By *HERMAN BANG*

Denied a Country

By *SIGRID UNDSET*

The Bridal Wreath

The Mistress of Husaby

The Cross

The Ship Sails On

by NORDAHL GRIEG

Translated from the Norwegian

by

A. G. Chater

NEW YORK

ALFRED · A · KNOPF

1927

PT
8FD
G76
S45
1927

839.823
G848S

COPYRIGHT 1927

BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

*

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AS

SKIBET GAAR VIDERE

COPYRIGHT 1924

BY GYLDENDALSKE BOKHANDEL

OSLO

*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA

The Ship Sails On

60747

I

A SHIP comes into port and halts for a while on her way from sea to sea. Fires are raked out, engines slow down to a dead stop with their glistening cranks and piston-rods, and the propeller churns up the foam in a last spasmodic stroke like the tail of a dying fish. One more turn of the wheel and the ship swings slowly in to the quay. Steel and hemp hawsers make her fast to the shore and she is delivered over to the dry land and its human forces.

The roar of motor lorries reverberates in the ship's iron sides, and the street casts its shadows and its mud where the ocean solitude has murmured day and night, where the blue seas crooned their songs of longing and the dawn quivered on plates still wet from the storm. To-day the surf of the town surges about the ship.

Winches rattle, cranes thrust their claws into the open holds and sling their booty ashore. The dockers, bow-legged and bent from their loads, are now masters of the ship. But in the evening all is quiet and only the ship's own people are left on board. They go ashore in a body, answering the call of the

port, the call of destruction with its husky laugh. In the course of the night they stagger on board, each man with his girl. But some of them leave the ship, bending under a grey seaman's bag, and they never come back.

Next day, however, there are no gaps in the crowd as they go ashore for their spree. New men quickly step into the vacant places, crawl up into the empty bunks and find the same women, the leavings of those who went ashore and are forgotten. That is the way of it, life has no time to waste. The days go by in a deaf and blind debauch till the ship puts to sea again.

But one night a young face appears on the quay in the darkness; a new hand who knows nothing. He stares up at the mighty world of iron that rises up before him, and wonders within himself: What is there inside the ship, what does she conceal?

And this is what he guesses:

She is a warehouse that moves about from port to port and sometimes visits lands of beauty. A community of human lives, with darksome clefts and ravines, but also with mountains rosy in the dawn. A Moloch that crushes the lives of men between its iron jaws, and then calmly turns its face to the solitudes as though nothing had happened. All this the ship is, and a thousand things besides. And he feels drawn to her and afraid of her.

Behind him the town blinks its myriad eyes, and

one of them is dear to him. But the ship rises up before him, dark and still as death. The town and the ship: to-night it seems that he must choose between life's happiness and life's adventure.

Benjamin Hall goes on board the ship.

Not a soul was to be seen on deck. A solitary, forlorn lantern hung on the rail, showing a dull flame within its sooty glass. Elsewhere all was dark as the grave; it was two o'clock.

He climbed down the ladder amidships and felt his way forward. The holds were open and a dizzying breath of air came up from their vast depths. Hatches and wire ropes lay in all directions.

At last he made his way to the narrow, pitch-dark alleyway forward under the forecastle head. He felt with his hands along the bulkhead, got hold of a handle at last and turned it. The door opened.

A stifling, putrid stench met his nostrils, almost making him sick. The forecastle was half in darkness; the lamp could barely burn with a sickly little flame in the heavy atmosphere. But after a while he saw that four men were sitting at the long table which almost filled the space. Behind them on the starboard side ran a double row of bunks, most of them hidden by dirty, ragged curtains. But in one bunk he saw two half-naked women, who turned and looked at him with sleepy eyes.

A stillness pervaded the place, and Benjamin could

hear there was life behind the curtains; a groan, a growl, an oath. But the men at the table sat motionless, staring at the new-comer.

"I'm the new ordinary seaman," said Benjamin hurriedly, and his unexpected words fluttered helplessly in the air.

One of the men spat reflectively — Benjamin afterwards found out it was the boatswain.

"That's all right!" he said. "You can take the upper bunk furthest aft. You'll have to chuck out the visitor that's in it."

Benjamin turned to the bunk that was to be his and drew the curtain aside. A mountain of naked flesh turned over, a pair of blue, pig's eyes blinked at him good-naturedly from a puffy face, and a coarse mouth showed its discoloured teeth in a broad smile.

"You must come out of that, please," said Benjamin quietly. "It's my bunk."

"I thought you'd brought me my morning coffee," said the girl, stroking his hair blandly.

A deluge of laughter and howls broke over the new hand; the whole room roared with frantic delight. Benjamin tried unsuccessfully to join in and felt infinitely abashed.

"No, you'll have to turn out, Maya," said the boatswain at last. "Everything's got to have an end and we're going to sea to-morrow anyway."

Maya gave an immense yawn and swung her feet

irksomely over the edge of the bunk. When she reached the deck she turned to Benjamin.

"Hold the glass for me, there's a dear," she said, with a kindly, almost motherly smile. "I must make myself look pretty, you see."

She arranged her greasy, tangled hair, while Benjamin held the glass as well as he could.

When that was finished he sat down beside the others, while Maya put on her clothes.

The table was slimy with remains of fish which blended with soda in a sickening stench. A filthy tin plate was filled to the brim with a disgusting mixture of syrup and melted butter.

One of the four began to talk; the seaman Oscar, who had a voice like a goat and eyes like a bitch: "You blokes ought to have seen the second mate today. He sat in his cabin with his sweetheart and he kept stroking her down the back; I could see it all from outside. Then all at once she broke down and started howling — 'Don't go away,' she says. 'My own man,' she says, 'my own!' Baa — aa!"

"Mind your own business, Oscar," said a long bronzed face underneath the lamp. "It's nothing to do with you, or us either."

There was deep silence.

"Oh, kiss me!" Oscar tried again, but the silence stopped him.

"Narvik's right," said the boatswain slowly and reflectively.

The fourth man at the table, a young white-haired lad, nodded thoughtfully: "Narvik's right."

And from behind a curtain came a faint echo: "Yes, Narvik's right." . . .

"She was a sweet girl, that one of the second mate's," said Maya, putting on her straw hat. "I met her on the quay and she asked the way to the *Mignon*. We came aboard together and she said good-bye so nicely — 'Many thanks for your trouble,' she said. And the second mate's a fine handsome fellow, we come from the same town. Well, good-bye, boys; take care of yourselves and come back soon."

And Maya disappeared through the door.

"She's all right, Maya," said the white-haired lad, whom they called Sivert, though he was christened Nikolai. "It's handy to have a girl aboard every blessed night and know that she's your own."

"Yes, you're for it now," said the boatswain, looking at him sideways with a grin.

But Sivert took no notice. He had something to say and blushed before he said it: "Do you remember that salvationist who came aboard last evening? He sat and ate his supper between Maya and me. 'I'm following in the Master's footsteps,' he said. '*He* used to sit like this with publicans and sinners. And it was harlots like Maya that Jesus loved.' Then he stroked her hair with his thin moist

fingers. 'Much shall be forgiven thee, for thou hast loved much,' he said. — He was a queer fellow," added Sivert quickly, blushing a deep scarlet at their silence.

Oscar sniggered behind his hand, and the boatswain asked if that was why Sivert took to Maya; but Narvik approved him with a nod.

Then one of the girls in the upper bunk raised herself on her tattooed arm. She had a coarse, ravaged face and her under lip was marked by a yellow scar. One of her shoulders was tattooed with the words "Your Arthur," and Benjamin had a notion that it was this name speaking with shameless blue lips.

"Mind yourself, Sivert," she said scornfully. "Maya's due for the Lock."

Sivert flared up.

"That's a lie, you blasted streetwalker!" he shouted.

The girl only laughed at him with quiet derision.

The other girl jumped up. — "It's not true, Sivert. Don't you be afraid. You can keep your dirty jaw to yourself, Normanna."

Normanna rolled over with a snarl. "Look out for yourself, Gunhild," she hissed, digging her nails into the other's shoulders till she roared with pain. In an instant the bunk was like a nest of snakes; they turned and twisted and wriggled, hitting at each other and hissing with rage.

The boatswain rushed up and pulled them apart. "No more of your nonsense," he cried. "Get ashore, both of you. There's nothing for you here, now your Haugesund boys have gone. Up she goes!" The girls jumped to the deck cursing and tumbled into some clothes. The boatswain drove them out before him and the forecastle was quiet again.

Narvik, who had been carving at a little boat, put his things together.

"It's time to turn in. Good-night all," he said in a kindly tone and vanished behind his curtain.

Then Oscar thought of turning in. "Bet your life Normanna'll get off with the bo'sen to-night," he confided to the others. "Him or Arthur, baa — aa."

Sivert and Benjamin were left alone at the table.

Heavy breathing was heard all round them and sleeping faces showed in the wan rays of the lamp. With mouths open and eyes puffy with sleep the men slipped away from life.

Sivert looked at the other with a curiously pale smile: "So you're the new ordinary seaman. I'm an ordinary too. It's me they call Sivert."

"My name's Benjamin."

"It feels a bit queer being on board at first, doesn't it? But this isn't always such a pigsty. It was those damned Haugesunders that brought women aboard, and now they've gone home. Well, I've been home too, a couple of days. They've built another storey on to the house and it's all going to be painted white.

No, it's hell lying alongside, you get a filthy mess everywhere. It'll be better to-morrow when we get to sea. That Normanna's a regular devil; a cursed tongue she has. Yes, it'll be much better to-morrow."

Suddenly he bent forward to Benjamin and whispered: "Do you think there's anything wrong with Maya?"

Benjamin didn't know why, but he had to answer with unshakable conviction: "No, I'm sure there isn't."

"No, of course not! That Normanna's a regular hell-cat. She was only lying as usual. I must tell you ——"

Sivert stopped short and looked about him with a surprised air. "Well, I guess it's time to turn in," he said with a smile. "Good-night, Benjamin."

"Good-night, Sivert."

All at once Sivert turned to him and said in a breath: "You've got to have women when you go to sea, that's plain, isn't it?"

There was a quiet snigger from one of the bunks and Sivert quickly got behind his curtain.

Benjamin found his sea-chest in a corner among a pile of oilskins and sea-boots, in a pungent smell of grease and turpentine. He pulled out his bed-clothes and flung the old ones out of his bunk.

There was nothing but a foul and ragged mattress, shedding its hay in all directions.

How strange to think that once its owner came

aboard with a new mattress to live his life in the ship. Up there another man had lain and thought and dreamt for months, it was his little world on board. An old worn-out mattress is all that is left of it. Another man spreads his blankets and lives up there until the hour strikes for him too. And then a new man comes and kicks aside his relics. Lives and destinies come and go in the forecastle, but the ship does not change.

She is eternity ——

He made his bed and took off his clothes, the blue suit that looked so clean and smart in this putrefying hole. He folded it carefully, with a sort of bashful caress, and dropped it into the chest.

It was as though he had buried a part of his life. Only two hours before he had sat in those clothes with Eva; it was all so unreal, a beautiful white dream that must have been dreamt by somebody else. And his memories came over him one by one with their fond sweetness, with scents and starry nights and kisses under purple lilacs. For the first time in his nineteen years he had met love, and that was only three days ago — only three days had he lived, but it was a year of glory. Her eyes had such a soft gleam of amber, her name was Eva and she was wonderful.

Now the ship had parted them.

He got out his working clothes and hung them on the curtain cord, as all the others had done. Then he got into his bunk.

He thought he was lying at the bottom of a dark and stinking well; but high above him he saw a twinkling star and it looked so kind and good.

He was awakened by the door opening.

"Oh, no, I daren't, I daren't," whispered a frightened Nordland voice outside in the darkness.

"Oh, to hell with you!" answered a rough man's voice. "Don't put on frills."

A tall, powerful man came in, almost dragging a young girl after him. He had an unusually handsome, but hard and low-bred face. But she was small and delicate, with reddish brown hair and big grey eyes that flickered anxiously in her sweet freckled face. There was a touching, helpless appeal in her dainty freckles; they belonged to a little girl.

"I'm so frightened," she whispered. "It's the first time I've been on board a boat. I've never been like this before, you know."

"Everything's got to have a beginning," he said with a smile. "Just as well here as anywhere else."

"Oh, no, no, there are people here and it's light." She looked shyly at Benjamin.

"Don't make such a damned fuss about it, but get into bed," commanded her friend.

"All right, directly; but please put out the light first, I'm so frightened," she said in a trembling voice.

At that moment there was a noise in the alleyway of two voices wrangling, and the door was flung open with a bang.

Two firemen came reeling in; one of them was fearfully drunk.

"Now by God we'll show these bloody sailor-men what we think of 'em," he muttered, lurching forward.

All of a sudden he pulled himself up and stood stiff as a post. His bloodshot eyes bulged as if they would burst and his open lips twitched and quivered. His arms dropped to his sides — he looked like a man who sees into hell but doesn't believe it.

With a hoarse groan he staggered forward to where the girl was standing. She saw the dark figure threatening her, and she clambered quickly into the bunk and hid behind the curtain.

Benjamin could hear her faint whimpering.

"What are you doing with her?" roared the fireman, swaying forward; "let her go!"

"What the hell have you got to do with my girl?" asked the other, calm and provocative.

"Let her go, I say!"

"See you damned first," answered the seaman. "Get back to your own quarters, Anton, and don't come worrying decent people."

At that the fireman raised a weak and shaky hand and let it drop with a smack on the seaman's face.

"You devil," he growled.

A terrible punch sent him crashing against the table and he fell full length on the deck.

Instantly the seaman took hold of him and dragged

him out of the forecastle. The other fireman followed. In a minute or two the seaman came back.

"What the hell has he got to do with my girl?" he appealed to the sleepers. "The fellow was dead drunk. Now he's lying out on deck howling and spewing. What the devil did he want with her, tell me that?" He looked at Benjamin for an answer, but Benjamin gave him none.

He was sick with shame at himself; but "What do I know about it, what can I do?" he asked, in his own excuse.

"Now I shan't be long," muttered the seaman to the girl behind the curtain.

"But put out the light first, do please," she whimpered.

"Keep your mouth shut a minute," he snarled at her, throwing his braces over his shoulders.

At that moment Anton's companion appeared at the door.

"You dirty low-down devil, that's what you are. Think yourself hellish brave hitting a man when he's drunk and helpless, don't you, Aalesund?"

Then he suddenly dropped his voice to a whisper: "But you shouldn't have hit him all the same. Anton's lying out on deck crying. He says she's his sister — do you hear? — his sister."

"Oh, go to hell," growled Aalesund and crawled up into the bunk.

II

BENJAMIN stood by the bulwarks staring into the gathering dusk. The waves swished gently along the ship's sides as she went forward under the dull throbbing of the engines.

A cold, squally breeze ruffled his hair. The gulls hovered aft with raucous cries over the bubbling wake of the ship. Far away the sea was bounded by a long line of grey rock.

The *Mignon* was still following the Norwegian coast. Here and there a light blinked ashore, tiny yellow sparks in the gloaming. Strange that a far-off little flame like that, losing itself in the vast windy space, should be a lamp within a room, by which a man sat reading his paper with children playing around him. Along the roads through the brown heather there might be people walking: "Is that boat bound eastward?" one would ask. — "No, can't you see she's keeping an offing?" the other answers. — "She's only such a tiny dot," the first one says in excuse.

It is the *Mignon* they are talking about, where Benjamin stands by the bulwarks staring out into the evening gloom.

His first day had come to an end, full of noise and confusion. Winches clattered, hawsers creaked, the ship slipped away from shore, hatches were battened down, decks swabbed, while he ran around and was everywhere in the way.

Now he had a lovely lot of hours to himself — till seven o'clock next morning.

Sivert was hanging about near him, looking forlornly at the land. Neither of them spoke; their minds were full of the tender melancholy of parting.

Sivert broke the silence with a long sigh.

"Well, well, now we're off again! I'd like to know how many more times I'll be hanging over the rail watching Norway disappear. It's a queer way God has of doing things: when we're at home we long to be away, and when we're at sea we long for home. One's never happy. Oh well, now and then perhaps. I was home a couple of days this trip, as soon as the ship touched Christiania. We passed the place this morning; I meant to have shown you our house, but I was at the wheel. I dare say you saw it, a nice yellow house, we had it abaft the beam on the starboard side when four bells went. They've just built another storey and it's all to be painted white.

"Father's a pilot. All my brothers are at sea, there's only Tor, the youngest, that's at home now. But he's a smart little chap, I can tell you. In the mornings we rowed out together and drew the nets.

It was dead calm as the sun came up. We could see all the fish quite plainly down below us. Then we landed on an island and made coffee. Oh, those were two fine days. I'd have liked to stay at home this time, but Dad thought I'd better wait till Kristen — that's my eldest brother — came home. Then we'll have some fun, I can tell you. But it's gone five bells, time for supper."

They shuffled into the forecastle.

A fresh smell of soap and salt water greeted them, all was clean and shipshape to-day. Around the table sat the hands at supper.

At first all the faces seemed merged in a grey mist, but as the day wore on, Benjamin had learnt to distinguish them and put a name to each.

There was Narvik, the oldest of the crowd, whose opinion was respected by all the young ones. There was the herculean Manna, with his whole left cheek scored by a horrible scar. There was Pedro, with his gentle, melancholy face, always closed and inscrutable. Nobody knew anything about him except that he was a Spaniard and joined the ship in Java a year ago. But they could all place that dog Oscar; this was his first deep-sea trip, but he had been in the coasting trade seven years. And there was no shame in him, he talked to anyone who would listen of the days when he was the terror and the joy of stewardesses.

And then there was Risör, sandy-haired and freckled, with a laugh that showed the little milk-teeth in his huge jaws.

There were no more at the table. Handsome Aalesund was at the wheel and Leif, the ordinary seaman in his watch, was on the look-out; his heavy tramp could be heard on the deck just over their heads.

The only others were Sivert and Benjamin, the ship-broker's son who wanted to find out what the sea was like before he took to the business; two young lads who had made friends from the first, two faces turning together to look on life.

Benjamin took a seat by the side of the little Spaniard. Pedro patted him on the shoulder and mumbled: "Benjamin fine, *mucho bueno*."

The others laughed and Pedro looked surprised. Then they went on eating in silence. It was canned beef with brown sauce.

"The sauce is all right, but the meat's no good," said Manna with a quiet eructation.

At last Narvik put down his knife and fork, and Benjamin noticed that Risör and Sivert quickly followed his example. They seemed to copy Narvik in everything.

"We shan't get things into proper shape till we're out at sea," remarked Narvik reflectively.

"No, that's so," nodded Sivert.

"It's a queer thing that," Risör pondered.

"I hear they're awful wild with Aalesund on the other side of the alleyway," said Sivert. "They say he got hold of fireman Anton's sister. But that can't be true, eh?"

At once the horrors of the night came down upon Benjamin.

"It doesn't sound likely," said Manna. "All the time Anton's been aboard he's been jawing about that sister of his, a regular nuisance he's been. She was so good and so kind, you never heard the like. He always made up his mind when he was at sea that she was to draw some of his pay, but I expect he forgot about it when he was ashore. She wrote letters to him too. He showed me one of them, a bully letter it was. Nice clear writing. No, it can't have been her."

"Yes, it was her all right," said Risör, extricating himself from the bench. "Fireman Gustav told me about it. But it's a long story and we've got to go and relieve."

He and Manna went out.

"It was a shabby thing of Aalesund not to let her go," said Benjamin, and his own voice surprised him.

"Here we have Aalesund himself, so now you can tell him that." Oscar giggled into his plate and glanced mischievously at Benjamin.

"Is anybody talking about me?" asked Aalesund, crossing his bare tattooed arms over his chest. His face looked even harder and blacker than the night before.

"Yes, I was saying you might have left Anton's sister alone."

"Oh, it was you, was it, youngster? You'd do bet-

ter playing at Child Jesus in the temple instead of going to sea! Get away home and ask your mammy to take you back, and don't come meddling with grown-up people's business. Or else I'll soon bash your swelled head for you, mind that with my compliments."

Oscar laughed admiringly.

But Sivert came to Benjamin's rescue.

"He only said what we all think. You needn't have picked out a shipmate's sister. How would you like it if you found *your* sister aboard here?"

"That's not the question," retorted Aalesund. "My sister's nothing to do with any of you, but I'm not going to be talked to by any young brat that hasn't found his feet yet."

Oscar grinned and squirmed with delight: "Aalesund's the man to talk."

All the rest sat in silence, watching the speakers.

For a second Benjamin looked down into the abyss of his own contemptibleness; he might whitewash himself with reproaches, but when the cock crew he held his tongue and denied.

But the abyss closed again and he spoke: "It's hard for a new hand like me to say anything, because some of you will think I'm trying to be cocky. But what Sivert says is right. You wouldn't have liked to find your own sister on board."

"Oh, hold your damned jaw," yelled Aalesund. "Have I got to account to you? Let my sister alone.

She's a thousand times too good to be bandied about by you."

"The boy has a right to say what he likes," said Narvik calmly. "You know I'm not the man to put my nose into other people's business, Aalesund, yours least of all; but nobody can deny that Benjamin's right."

"Yes, yes," said Pedro suddenly in his queer hoarse voice. "Aalesund *no bueno*."

"Nobody asked you, you damned dago," shouted Oscar. Pedro was the only one he dared bully, because he was so infinitely long-suffering. As a rule Oscar preferred to back Aalesund and crawl out of the way of the others.

"You're always so hellish good and pious, Narvik," Aalesund threw out. "And you can mind your dirty mug, Pedro, so now you know it!"

"That'll do now, Aalesund. I'm sick of you and your jaw."

Narvik got up; his face was stiff and cold and his eyes gleamed like blue steel.

Aalesund returned his stare with a black look, full of hate.

The forecastle was still as death. The two men simply stood watching each other. Everybody knew that it was a calm before the storm.

At that moment there was a feeble scratching at the door.

Sivert went to open it and in jumped Santos.

Santos was the ship's dog, a lively little Argentine terrier that Sivert stole down in Rosario last trip. He ran all over the ship from morning till night and was hugely beloved by all hands.

He bounded up to Aalesund and jumped on to his knees. Aalesund pushed him off, but he jumped up again and licked his hand. Then Aalesund began to stroke his head, and his face seemed to soften a little.

All at once the door was flung open with a bang. It was Risör. "Is Santos here? Hide him, hide him! The second mate's going to kill him, I just heard it amidships."

And he vanished again into the dark.

Quick as lightning Aalesund seized Santos and lifted him into his bunk. "Lie still," he said and spread the blankets over him.

The second mate was in the doorway, with a marlinspike in his hand.

He was met by a dull, brooding silence.

"Is Santos here?" he asked.

"No," answered Aalesund.

"No," answered Narvik.

"That's strange, I was certain — Santos has got to be killed."

"Killed?" asked Narvik.

"Yes. There's six months' quarantine for dogs in England and we're calling at South Shields for bunkers. That's why Santos has got to be killed."

"Then you'll have to find him yourself," said

Sivert, looking at him defiantly. "And he won't be so easy to find. But didn't I hear that the skipper had got a fine Angora cat amidships?"

"Well, what about it?"

"Only that I've been told cats are very liable to go overboard when she rolls a bit," said Sivert calmly, looking him in the eyes.

"I've heard that too, Sivert," said Narvik with a smile.

"So have I."

"So have I."

The second mate looked round at the cold, determined faces.

"Don't be absurd, boys. Santos has got to be killed."

"It may be a difficult job, that," said Aalesund.

"Do you think I'm going to kill him for my own amusement? The skipper's given orders and it's got to be done. Where is Santos?"

"Santos?" said Sivert. "Who's that? Oh yes, I believe there was once a dog for'ard called Santos, but we didn't care about him. We let the skipper kill him."

"Not so much of your lip, Sivert!" growled the second mate. "You, Narvik, you're the oldest here and you're generally a sensible man — where is the dog?"

"I don't care to say anything about it," replied Narvik.

"Look here, boys," said the second mate in a familiar tone, sitting down on the bench among them. "Santos has got to be killed. That's as clear as daylight. The man who finds him will get a nice reward and thanks into the bargain."

Oscar put up his head. His brown eyes, which dominated his whole face, began to light up and he sent a longing glance in the direction of Aalesund's bunk. If the dog was going to be killed anyhow, somebody might as well have the reward, and why not he? Besides, he never liked Santos or any other dog.

"A nice reward," repeated Aalesund. "Thirty pieces of silver is the rate, isn't it? I don't believe there's anybody here who wants to betray Santos for that."

But the officer was not listening to him; he followed the direction of Oscar's glance. Now he knew where the dog was.

He got up: "So you force me to search for myself. All right, I'll have a try."

He crouched down and looked along the deck. The stillness was enough to hurt. All hands sat like statues, following his movements. Benjamin thought he could hear their hearts beating around him.

The second mate has finished down below, where will he look now?

O God, he's starting to search the bunks. He shakes out the blankets and goes from bunk to bunk. Nearer and nearer — now there is only Aalesund's.

He knew that Santos was there. He could even distinguish the soft outlines of the little body under the blanket. Then he seemed suddenly paralysed by the thrill of the silence around him.

He turned and looked at the men.

Oscar was all ready to greet the finding of the dog with a snigger, but the others gave the officer a queer feeling.

Some of the faces were pale and drawn with anxiety, but others were hard and threatening, full of hate.

The nerves of all were as taut as backstays.

Was he touched at this fidelity to a dog, or did he feel there might be danger in tempting the men too far?

He calmly passed his hands over Aalesund's bunk and said: "No, I can't find the dog. I give it up. It's a bore. Good-night, men."

"Good-night," they gasped.

The door closed behind him.

Shouts of joy filled the forecastle. They all jumped up, howling, laughing, dancing. Benjamin suddenly found Aalesund embracing him. Oh, they were wild with delight!

Sivert dashed to set Santos free. The dog jumped down to the deck and was pitched about like a nut-shell in a sea of caresses.

"Little Santos, yes, you're a beauty, our own little Santos. Did you see how quiet he lay? He knew what

was up. Yes, Santos is a tiptopper, he is. Good little Santos!"

The men stammered their meaningless little outbursts of affection, in the language only used to dogs and little children.

"I'd like to know if the second mate saw him," said Narvik.

"What are you thinking of?" said Sivert; "he'd have cracked him on the head with his spike."

"I'm not so sure," Narvik wondered. "But my word, it was a good thing Aalesund was so smart at hiding him when the mate came in."

"Yes, that was neatly done! But for Aalesund it would have looked pretty bad for Santos." And Sivert hugged the dog in his arms and pressed its head against his.

"Oh, it was nothing much I did," said Aalesund modestly. "But you were good, Sivert, the way you gave him that about the Angora cat. You'd heard cats got lost overboard when she rolled, you said."

"By gum, that cat would have gone overboard too, if they'd killed Santos," Leif swore.

"Yes, the skipper could bet his boots on that," said Benjamin.

He felt so happy that he could have cried. His soul went out to the others; he could have fallen on his knees and thanked God that Santos was saved and that he had a share in this happiness.

Aalesund went and sat down by Narvik. — "You

were right," he said. "But I didn't believe it was Anton's sister. I was drunk, you see. It's queer the way it takes you."

Peace was made.

"Yes, it's queer," assented Narvik with a smile. "It might happen to the best of us."

Aalesund nodded to Sivert and Benjamin, and they felt good at this reconciliation.

And all at once it seemed to Benjamin that the night had not been so brutal and hideous after all. Aalesund didn't know it was Anton's sister and what Narvik said was true — such things might happen to the best of them.

And as he stood looking at these men dancing round with eyes bright with the same happiness that sang within himself, he divined for the first time the meaning of the words — "Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . ."

At last they calmed down sufficiently to turn in. Benjamin lay in a rapture of happiness. Santos had settled himself in his bunk for the night.

He stroked Santos's warm coat again and again till the dog went to sleep. Then he was careful to lie still so as not to wake it.

Outside was the roar of the sea and the darkness.

III

BENJAMIN woke up in the course of the night.

O God, he was on board the ship. A dull qualm settled upon him. The men's breathing snorted around him and the air was thick with the smell of food and Virginia tobacco. It was as though a moist film of dirt and grease had formed over his face and when he stroked his forehead he had to wipe a deep groove before reaching the skin.

He felt sick and miserable.

Suddenly he rolled over hard against the bulkhead and started up. Wasn't that something alive and soft stirring under him? With a little whimper Santos jumped to the deck.

There was a scurry along the table, two huge fat rats scampered down it, showing their fangs in a grin before they vanished. Santos flew after them, but too late. He pawed about among the sea-boots and then jumped up into a bunk.

Benjamin breathed more freely; it had given him such a queer feeling to watch the dog's movements.

A dull thud shook the bulkhead and the ship lay over on her side. It was a sea surging over the scuttle.

With nerves on edge Benjamin lay waiting for the next. There — a dark green flood overwhelmed the scuttle, burying everything. Then the ship lifted again and the water poured off the glass. Another sea rose in the darkness, crashing into the ship like a battering-ram, and Benjamin was hurled over with her. He clung fast to the edge of the bunk with both hands, while his whole inside gurgled nauseously backwards and forwards.

There must be a hurricane outside. And it was quite uncanny to lie here with nothing but a piece of brittle glass and a few inches of iron between you and the mighty, roaring sea.

Strange that the others don't wake up; they're snoring and groaning every one. The lamp, burning feebly, swings backwards and forwards like a pendulum and the shadows keep time with it in the semi-darkness.

Oh, can't that blasted lamp stop still? it's enough to drive one mad. He wants to get out and lash it, but a giddy numbness keeps him back.

How revolting and absurd to lie awake while the seconds crawl on through the long night! He tries to sleep, forces himself to think of a tree he's on good terms with at home; he can always go to sleep when he thinks of that tree. But no — his thoughts refuse

to rise, he can do nothing but stare up at the deck-plates over his head.

A melancholy cockroach creeps slowly along the top of his bunk and in one place the paint is blistered.

Shall he kill the cockroach and break the blister?

He lets them be.

O God, what a racket there was down in the fore-peak, iron clanging against iron incessantly with a cruel hammering on his bared nerves!

But it was not from the forepeak that the real torture came. The air vibrated with a desperately attenuated sound of singing iron, the whole ship rang with this slender note, which is worse than death; it crept into his brain and transformed its cells into metal, into a thousand brazen bells, swinging with a hollow, droning sound in time with a million more.

The perspiration broke out on his forehead and he felt clammy all over. His stomach swung backwards and forwards, threatening to rush to his head. He got out his life-belt and tied it tightly round him, but nothing was any good.

With wide, staring eyes and tightly pressed lips he felt the horror sink into him.

The cockroach disappeared into a crack and all was more lonely and terrible than before.

Then he heard the door open and the roar of the gale outside, and then all was still. It was Sivert who came in. In the dim light Benjamin could see him sit

down on his chest by the door and bury his face in his hands.

What was this? Was Sivert sick too?

A feeling of infinite kindness for Sivert rose within him. All around, the hands were snoring in their sound and bestial sleep without an inkling of how bad he was. But Sivert was his friend, Sivert would stay awake with him. All the rest were asleep and happy, Sivert and he were the only ones in the world.

Suddenly Sivert's face appeared close to his.

"I saw you were awake," he said, and Benjamin could see he was chewing. "I've just come from the wheel. You can think yourself lucky you're in the day watch and don't have to turn out at all hours of the night. Ough! it's so dreary to stand up there in the dark thinking. I couldn't help wondering if it's true what that hell-cat Normanna said. But it was only because she's full of devil's tricks, wasn't it?"

His eyes shone with a strange, hungry supplication.

But Benjamin was filled with an immense disappointment. Sivert wasn't sick, he didn't understand anything, he was just like the rest.

"Yes, that must have been it," he said without warmth or conviction.

Sivert shuffled empty-handed back to his chest.

Benjamin was left alone with his throes. What were a few nagging thoughts beside this deadly nausea that swelled inside him? Sivert could chew tobacco; had he anything to grumble at?

A sea hit the ship's side with a crash and Benjamin groaned aloud.

The seasickness contracted within him like a beast of prey crouching for a spring. He had to fight to keep it down, but it rose wilder and more crafty every minute.

All at once he came to think of Maya; he saw her lying where he was now, her body expanded and grew colossal, at last there was nothing else in the world.

But by degrees another idea forced its way to the front; he resisted it, he would not have it, but it came in spite of him, pressing up through the image of Maya — the thought of Eva. The stars and the lilacs were gone; all he knew of her was a sentence that sniggered again and again in his ear. "So you've got hold of Eva; well, there's a good deal of temperament about her farewells at the garden gate, I've heard." Those were the words of his best friend.

He tried to conjure up another image of Eva, but could not. A feeling of boundless resentment took possession of him, against her, and not only her but against all who were happy because they were not at sea.

What evil had he done that God should smite him so hard?

He hated all the cheerful people ashore, he hated God for controlling the storm so badly, he hated his shipmates for snoring and understanding nothing. He was the only sufferer in the world.

The lamp lurched backwards and forwards. The seas struck against the scuttle, the chains rattled and a thousand different sounds grated against one another.

By degrees his brain grew numbed by the clangour of the night and he sank into a dim, uneasy doze.

He was wakened by Pedro shaking him.

"Up she goes!" he smiled. "Six bells going byme-by."

The others were already on their feet, yawning and stretching. Benjamin was certain he would die if he had to get down and put on his clothes.

But he managed it somehow, and found himself sitting at the table, distracted and dumb. Food he could not touch.

"There's a fresh breeze," said Sivert, cutting himself a huge slice of bread. "I never feel so well as when it blows a bit."

Benjamin scowled at him. There were limits to this kind of blowing.

The boatswain appeared at the door.

"Six bells has gone, you fellows. There's nothing for it but to turn to."

"Is it anything but duty morning till night?" asked Oscar in an offended voice as he reached out for the margarine tin.

"No, they sweat the guts out of us, those beggars amidships!" growled Aalesund, buckling his belt.

"Yes, they know the style aboard this dug-out," said Narvik.

"Is this the sort of coffee to offer a man?" grumbled Manna. "I'll give that scallywag in the galley something to go on with. We're not going to take anything he likes to give us."

"No, the coffee wasn't fit to drink," admitted the boatswain for the sake of peace. "You've got to come now, men."

One after another the hands got up and followed him slowly and sullenly.

All around was sea, nothing but sea! Slate-grey, white-crested waves rushed on through the vast expanse. A pale, windy morning sky rose like a dome above them, its rim scalloped by the waves.

As Benjamin was looking at the horizon, the bulwarks slowly rose till he could see nothing but the cold, empty air. A salt breeze sang in the taut stays and rushed violently to the very bottom of his lungs. Now and again a shower of spray dashed over the deck.

Benjamin was trying to walk aft with the rest, when the ship's side rose again into the sky; he curled up and made a dash for the rail.

"Lee side, you fool!" yelled the boatswain.

Oscar smacked his thighs and bleated with laughter: "Oh, look at Benjamin!"

Benjamin felt overwhelmed with shame and humiliation.

"Are you sick?" asked Manna.

The idiotic question made Benjamin furious.

"Can't you see?" he shouted back.

"Why, this is fine weather," said Risör, looking surprised.

"Summer day," muttered Sivert, who couldn't make it out.

"Shut up! A boat in ballast's none too easy," said Narvik and Benjamin loved him for it.

"Ah no, not when she's in ballast," Risör admitted thoughtfully.

But then a thing happened that cheered Benjamin up. He saw a figure make a plunge for the rail on the lee side of the well. It was Leif.

"Benjamin's not so bad," said the boatswain. "He'll be all right now, I can see that in him. Tomorrow he won't know what seasickness means, he's not like Leif. That chap'll never get over it."

And in fact Benjamin felt wonderfully better. He smiled at them with a pale face. "Yes, that did some good, I'll be all right presently."

"There's only one cure for seasickness," declared Manna; "but it's sure. Leif ought to try it. I once went out fishing with a fellow who was much worse than anybody I've ever seen. But he did what he was told and he's never been seasick since. He spewed in the baler and then swallowed it."

They all howled with laughter and Benjamin found to his surprise and joy that he could laugh too. He must be over the worst now.

And as he stood by the rail joining in his shipmates' laughter — with the strong, salt breath of wind and

waves surging about him in naked space — he suddenly understood what the sea means to seamen.

To people ashore it is something to dream about. But to the sailor the sea is his own hard world. It is the sea he curses and spits upon and wishes himself quit of; it is the sea he loves and longs to return to; it is the sea that gives him his livelihood and will one day give him his death.

IV

ONCE more the ship comes into port and the old game begins again.

The hands troop ashore for drink and women before they put to sea. Thirty days and nights they will be at sea this time — it takes as long as that from Shields to Cape Town. And thirty days in a tramp is a tough proposition for grown-up men with hair on their chests ——

But there were two who shuffled off early in the afternoon and anxiety showed in their dawdling steps. It was Sivert and Aalesund going ashore to the doctor.

There was only one man left in the seamen's quarters, Narvik.

"I never care to go ashore," he said to the others with a smile. "I get on best aboard." And he sat down under the lamp to carve away at his little wooden boat, which was never finished.

Benjamin stood amidships. He was on duty at the gangway till twelve at night. He was the youngest hand and had to put up with staying on board; that was the way of things.

But the lights were twinkling on both sides of the Tyne, the town roared, the sirens shrieked, red and green lights came sailing down the river. The arc-lamps on the quay sent quivering streaks of light across the smooth black stream. Nothing is so lovely as one of these streaks of light, it excites joy and fear and a longing for the hidden world of darkness. And it is hard to stay on board when one is nineteen and the pale pillars of light of a foreign town tremble so silently on the water!

But above the ship was a coal-shoot. An immense dark skeleton of iron hung over the open bunkers, and out of it came an endless clattering belt of black stones. The dust whirled everywhere, it stuck to the white paint, which was damp from the evening mist, and it penetrated all the pores of the man who stood amidships gazing into the night.

It began to rain; coal-dust and drizzle descended together upon the *Mignon*.

The hours wore on. Benjamin slipped into the galley to take shelter from the rain. It was comfortable in there by the friendly glow of the fire. Half-past nine came, and the first to arrive was Leif.

"Have Sivert and Aalesund come back?" was the first thing he asked.

"No, not yet."

"I wonder how they got on."

Leif came into the galley and sat down on the

bench. His face was pale and sweaty and there was a reek of whisky in his breath.

He sat and looked at Benjamin for a while, and then said suddenly: "You got over your seasickness, didn't you?"

"Oh yes, pretty well," answered the other.

"Is this your first trip?"

"Yes, I've never been to sea before."

There was a moment's silence; then Leif spoke again: "Well, some people are lucky. Do you know, I've been to sea now eleven months and I only get worse and worse. I feel bad if I only go down to the harbour. I'm miserable if I stand here on deck and feel that I'm on board a ship. And when the engines start I'm so sick that I'm ready to die. Every single day is hell, because it's the sea all the time. My stomach retches just as if I had a fit, it's frightful. And now we're going to be out for thirty days. But I might be able to put up with it if I thought I could get well. But I don't believe I ever can. For, do you know, I believe God's down on me."

A nervous trepidation had come over Leif; his face was a glaring white, while his big outstanding ears were flaming red. His huge Adam's apple stood out like a sharp excrescence in his wiry throat, and when he spoke, it worked up and down like an unsightly piston under the tightly strained skin.

"I don't know why it is, but God is after me all the time. A year and a half ago I went to the States;

I was to have a job with an uncle of mine. There were two hundred and fifty-six emigrants on board, and two hundred and fifty-five were allowed in. There was one who didn't get in. That was me. I was sent back, everybody laughed at me, the boys in the street called me the American toad. I was that one man — oh, God was after me right enough. But that wasn't the worst. As soon as I came back I went into a barber's to get shaved. Everybody else goes in and comes out again as well as ever; but not me. I got barber's itch — do you know what that is? For three months I had to go about with a poultice on my face. I had to go and live in the country with my aunt so that people shouldn't see me. And then I went to sea, that was my fancy. It must be a grand life, I thought; and I dare say it is for the others. I'd always been so good at school, I was top of the class, and I thought to myself, perhaps you can take a mate's ticket, who knows if you won't be skipper? But now — I'm sick and sick and I shall never get better. It's frightful, cruel hard."

His voice rose almost to a shriek; then he turned abruptly and went out.

Benjamin watched him disappear down the gangway. It was only a man who had discovered that he hadn't had enough to drink; he'd want another whisky or two, since God was down on him.

Benjamin felt a sudden void; it was so lonely after he had gone. But it was not that he missed Leif and

his troubles, it was simply a painful feeling of desolation. The silence lay heavy and drowsy around Benjamin, and the hard ticking of the alarm-clock told him how deep and brooding it was. Now and then a piece of coal fell out of the galley fire with an absurdly loud noise. The solitude gained upon him; nothing is so powerful as solitude, it drones with stillness from everlasting to everlasting.

Oh, if he could feel a little hand in his, a kind little creature to help him face this dismal lifelessness! Longing, absence vibrated through him like the notes of a 'cello.

"Eva, dear Eva" — Benjamin whispered again and again, and his voice dwelt on the name as with a caress.

A patter of footsteps came along the deck; he started up and saw a figure blocking the doorway. It was fireman Anton.

"Oh, it's only you?"

"Yes, it's only me. I wanted to ask you something."

Fireman Anton's voice had a bashful refinement in it.

"I've hurt my hand, you see, and there was a letter I wanted so badly to get written. I promised to write, it's to a relation."

Benjamin became uncomfortably wide-awake, full to the brim of reality. He looked inquisitively at the fireman, but his face was half turned and his eyes avoided contact.

"I see, to a relation," said Benjamin slowly, and added with malicious acuteness: "it's to your sister, I dare say."

Anton gave a start, a blush came over his face and and he answered in a low voice: "Yes, it's to my sister."

Benjamin felt a wave of cruel joy, a keen desire to dissect this man, to study the spasms of his soul. Besides, in the seamen's quarters they had had it all out about that night alongside, Aalesund had given him a nod, and Anton was now nothing but a dirty fireman.

"Yes, I don't mind writing," he said. "Have you got any paper? What am I to say?"

Anton fingered his cap nervously and bent the shiny peak mechanically in and out.

"I'm not sure," he said, looking down for some moments. "I expect you know that my sister was on board. It was one of your lot that brought her, and she's only seventeen. — She's in service in Christiania; I don't understand how she could go wrong; no, I can't make it out at all. She was so pure and innocent, as you might say, when I was at home. There's only us two, you see. But it wasn't her fault, I ought to have looked after her, only I didn't know she was in Christiania. Yes, if I hadn't behaved so badly she would never have come aboard like that. But now it's all going to be different. She's gone home to Bodö and she's to draw half my pay and it's all going to come right again.

"I met her as she was going ashore that night. 'Oh God, are you here?' she said, and took to trembling all over.

"But then we sat down on a hatch and had a talk, and we stayed there till six and she was crying all the time. She'd got into a bad set of girls, you can guess how it was, she thought it was the right thing; no, it wasn't her fault. But now it's all going to come right; I'm only going to make this trip, then I shall go home and get a job at the herring-oil factory. Then I'll be able to look after my sister better.

"I've been a bad lot, I know that, but now it's all going to be different."

"Now I want you to write that I'm thinking about her and I hope she gets the allotment money all right. I can't think of anything else to write about. 'Kind regards from your brother Anton Olsen.'"

And Benjamin wrote in his biggest and roundest hand the little letter to the sister at Bodö.

And as he wrote it he felt a stab of pain, a yearning to be kind and charitable, to feel pity for those whom life had stricken.

"I have a sister too," he said suddenly. "I know what it would be like."

The truth was that his sister, little Anni, was only eleven, a dainty little thing with tiny, schoolgirl's hands. She came in when there were visitors and curtsied good-night. And all their eyes lit up with a

tender little smile when she was gone. That was little Anni.

But all Benjamin knew was that he wanted to take some of Anton's burden upon himself; were they not both brothers, had they not each a sister? He was ready to make a sacrifice of his.

But Anton was not listening to him. He stood with the letter in his hand, gazing vacantly before him.

"I can tell you it's fine at home now," he said at last. "Midnight sun over Landegod; oh, it's magnificent scenery."

At that Benjamin stared suspiciously at the fireman. So Anton was beginning to make a boast of his sorrow, he was so grand in his melancholy that he had a right to talk like a book: "Oh, it's magnificent scenery," he said!

And there was something about him Benjamin didn't like, a faltering softness that seemed almost slimy out here in the hard life of the sea.

Benjamin said no more and forced Anton out by his silence.

Now the men came reeling on board thick and fast, their shouts and yells were heard all down the quay, roars of merriment and howls of rage; they were drunk, the whole gang, and the drunkest of all was Leif.

Benjamin stood at the rail watching the figures come and go, a spectator of the vessel's drama.

And he wondered whether he himself would ever be found playing his part in deadly earnest like all the rest.

About half an hour before midnight Sivert and Aalesund came aboard. They walked up the gangway in joyless and sinister silence; neither had had anything to drink.

Sivert pulled up in front of him: "No, there's no need for you to ask," he said in a hard voice; "we've had our knock, both I and Aalesund. But didn't I tell you Maya was the harlot Jesus loved?"

He broke into a wild, shrill laugh, then his face shut up suddenly and went ashy grey with despair. He turned sharp round and walked forward.

"I'm sorry for Sivert," said Aalesund, following him with his eyes. "But everything must have a beginning, and he'll soon get well. It's nothing dangerous. But that wasn't what I wanted to say, it was something different. I'm going to run to-night. I wanted to give you the tip. I'm sick of it all; I'm going to see about getting home. You need only say you haven't seen anything."

When Aalesund came back with his bag, Benjamin stopped him. He was quite pale and short of breath as he asked; "I say, Aalesund, if you're ill, what about Anton's sister?"

"I'd give a lot for her to get off," replied Aalesund stooping over his bag. "Don't tell Anton I'm

ill. It isn't good for a man to have too much to think about at sea. Good-bye, Benjamin, and thanks."

Aalesund crept cautiously down the gangway with his bag on his back. In a minute or two he had disappeared in the darkness. With scared eyes Benjamin stood on deck staring into the wet night.

V

THERE was a hard glitter of sunshine through the cold blast as the *Mignon* pounded her way down Channel.

The gulls rose and fell with flashing wings in the pale, thin air. A little smack to port buried her nose in the seas and struggled up again with a surprised look. Some distance ahead a five-masted barque swept on with huge black sails through the early evening. There was a shimmer of haze over the waves and far away a strip of England shone bright green in the setting sun.

Benjamin was among his shipmates washing paint on the bridge house. His ice-cold hands felt the sting of the sun and the salt spray was blown in his face, but this was life!

There was a laugh in his eyes, his mouth stood open to let the wind rush right in and do what it liked with him. Wasn't it many years since last night, or perhaps that was only a phantom of another life? His soul was filled with air, with the revelling breeze and with brine, he only had a dim memory of pale faces in the dark; the wind must have wiped them out and swept them away.

A new hand had come aboard that morning in place of Aalesund. There were plenty to choose from, the ship was not delayed a minute. At breakfast there was some talk of the man who had deserted, but at dinner there were more important things to discuss: work, weather, the speed of the ship. By coffee-time there had never been a man on board called Aalesund.

A man's life drifts away like a puff of breath. The bunk which was once his home on board is taken by a new hand; one evening his shipmates are busy washing paint amidships, empty-headed and cheerful in the salt-drenched breeze of the Channel, and they know him no more.

A life or two, a sorrow, an accident, all is left behind, all is forgotten. The ship sails on.

The dirty bulkheads were running with water, soda brought away the coal-dust and soon the paint was gleaming white. Every minute swept off huge masses of soot, swabbing went with a will, everything was dripping wet as in a spring thaw at home in Norway. Ah, it was grand to be alive!

The boatswain came padding along the deck in his slippers, jingling a bunch of keys in his hand. He stopped and watched the hands for a while, gravely spitting a brown stream. Then he pulled out his watch, looked at it thoughtfully, and said in a patronizing tone: "That's not so bad! You can knock off, men."

Two bells was struck as he spoke. Quick as lightning the men dropped their swabs, there was a clatter of zinc buckets and a tramping of feet, and an instant later not a soul was to be seen amidships.

"It's a damned funny thing that foxy-faced bo'sen couldn't knock off a bit sooner," growled Leif, and his Adam's apple jumped with indignation.

"That's his style," said Narvik, shrugging his shoulders.

There was a lively scene in the wash-house, gleaming naked bodies, howls of laughter, smacks and pinches, as the lads danced and carried on in the delight of their nakedness.

"Have you got any hair in your nose, Benjamin? I've got a tuft under my arm; come on, let's splice!"

This joke was brought out regularly every evening at sea and was always greeted with a roar of laughter. This evening it was Risör who came out with it, and he clapped his thighs like a madman with delight. His huge mouth with its tiny teeth was stiff with laughing.

But Benjamin knew what was expected of him. He pinched Risör violently in the thigh and asked in an insinuating voice: "Say, Risör, what was it your mother said when you were born?"

Risör clenched his teeth; now it was up to him.

But Benjamin had got a tender piece of skin between his nails and he pinched without mercy.

Suddenly Risör went red as fire and shrieked: "Drop it, you devil — will you let go, you swine!"

The deck was ready to collapse with the racket, and Benjamin's voice thrilled with joyful pride as he said the words which were to finish Risör. "It must have been a hell of a birth, that!"

Risör was chaffed to death about the way his mother had welcomed him and Benjamin's heart swelled.

The new hand, who had taken Aalesund's place, showed his enormous gums in a grin while the others were fooling. He was from Christiansund and had been on the bum two months in Newcastle before getting the job in the *Mignon*. Now he was busily polishing his round little stomach with a towel, while his face beamed with delight at getting back to the breezes and laughter of the seven seas.

They splashed and pinched each other, chasing around and larking. Manna took the lead in it all; his face was smiling all over, eyes, lips, even the terrible scar was part of the smile.

Benjamin had now found out how he got his scar. It was a memento of a knifing in the Lofoten fishery, Risör told him. The eye hung down over his cheek in a bloody bundle of nerves and it was six hours' sail to the nearest surgeon. But Manna sailed it. There was one other man in the boat, but when they got across he lay in a faint in the bows; he couldn't

stand the sight of blood. But Manna sat aft, holding the tiller in one hand and keeping his eye in place with the other.

There was only one man in the wash-house who didn't rejoice in his nakedness. Sivert. He stood by himself in a corner and got his washing done quickly and cheerlessly. His face was heavy with want of sleep. He finished first, took his bucket without a word, and went out.

The larking was kept up in the forecastle. But Sivert had drawn his curtain and Oscar was also in his bunk. He had got hold of a stump of pencil and was drawing some beautiful picture on the paintwork, no doubt one of the stewardesses of his coasting days.

Narvik sat under the lamp, chipping at his boat. Now and again he looked up and smiled at the others. They sat round the table enjoying themselves and talking smut, as is the way at sea. They had plenty to talk about — memorable answers each one of them had made to skippers or mates, or big sprees ashore in which whole crowds of girls had lost their virtue. Time went by like nothing till five bells rang out on the forecastle head.

"Come on, Benjamin, we'll fetch the grub!" Risör got up and trotted aft to the galley with Benjamin, who was now quite thrilled at belonging to such a band of heroes.

When they came back the forecastle greeted them

with a loud yell: "Porridge for supper, that's the limit! We won't touch it!"

Fireman Gustav appeared in the doorway.

"Burnt porridge for supper, is there any sense in that?"

They could hear the howls in the firemen's quarters.

"We'll go to the steward! We won't touch it. He can eat it himself if he likes."

"Yes, come on to the steward!" cried Gustav. "You're game, you fellows?"

"You bet," replied Narvik. "Burnt porridge for supper. Not much."

They poured into the narrow alleyway, firemen and deck hands all together.

Sivert and Oscar jumped out of their bunks, everybody rushed on deck, and Benjamin shivered with joy: the *Mignon* gang were on the war-path, hurrah!

It was all a trifle less imposing when they reached the open deck and looked around them, and the bridge house seemed to look at them with a sneering laugh. But Fireman Gustav ran aft carrying a dish of porridge aloft, and the others followed close on his heels. The dog Santos danced among their legs barking with delight. Since that evening in the North Sea nobody had had any idea of putting him away.

On coming up amidships they caught the steward at the door of his cabin. A flash of fear came into his

eyes; he tried to look unconcerned, but the men had seen through him, he had given himself away.

"What the flaming hell's the meaning of this?" asked Gustav, holding out the porridge dish. "Do you call this food for men who've got to work?"

The steward groped for a telling answer, but found none.

"What is it you want?" he said at last, hesitating and sulky.

"We want proper food and you may as well know it," said Narvik, calm as a figure of Justice.

The steward looked at him. He seemed to clutch at Narvik's composure, trying to gain support from it.

"Porridge is proper food, isn't it?" he answered; but there was a trace of alarm in his voice which spoilt it all.

"Oh, to hell with that!" shouted Fatty Mens. "Porridge is porridge, and this is burnt at that. We fellows who sweat in the stokehole day and night are going to be properly fed, so now you know it, you blasted ham-bone, you!"

A squall of derision broke over the steward.

Insults were let loose, the hands crowded round, abusing him with the worst names they could think of: "You son of a bitch, you bastard toad——"

"You Bergener!" yelled Oscar, though he knew very well the steward came from Flekkefjord.

The steward could only stare stiffly at the howling

mob with mortal terror in his eyes. He sent a silent appeal to Narvik, to Manna, to Benjamin; but no, mercy was nowhere to be found.

Every man wanted to distinguish himself, to find the most lurid insults; the noise grew and grew and suddenly Mens snatched the dish and slammed the porridge over the steward's face. His whole head was a sticky mass, he staggered forward, crying with rage and shame. His hands floundered in the air, he grasped his head and flung lumps of porridge over the deck. Then he turned and reeled into his cabin.

There was an instant's silence, then the uproar broke out. They were all flushed with excitement.

"That's right! That's the way to give it them, the devils!" bawled Gustav.

"Yes, that's right," shouted Benjamin.

"To the skipper!" roared Manna. "We'll teach these blighters amidships ——"

"Yes, come on to the skipper!" yelled several more.

"Is it me you want to speak to?"

There was at once dead silence among the hands. A little close-knit figure stood at the top of the bridge companion. A subtle, scornful smile played on the thin lips. Everything about him was sure and determined — the brown, clean-cut face, the snow-white cap with the Beatty tilt, the pressed trousers, the polished shoes, all made up a picture of firmness and authority. And he stood on the top step of the com-

panion, looking down at the men like a statue of calm contempt.

The compact band below seemed shattered into a loose bunch of men, caught unawares and thrown off their balance by this caustic smile.

The skipper held his pipe in his hand, a short briar with a big, shapely bowl. He calmly put it in his mouth and slapped his left pocket for matches. He pulled out a box, struck a match, and lit his pipe. After that he came down one step, stopped and looked for a second at the men below with his scornful little smile; then he threw away the match with a careless gesture. The wind caught it and carried it over the side.

The hands had followed his movements with eyes of astonishment; his impudent indifference dazed and disturbed them. They forgot all the rest; their attention was concentrated on the little man above.

They stood like this, uncertain, almost bashful, until the silence became so painful that it had to be broken.

"We've been given burnt porridge for supper," muttered Gustav, and his shipmates flared up at the sound of his voice.

"You have, have you?" said the skipper. "It was not too badly burnt for me to eat. However, it's a pity it was burnt, I agree with you there. I'll speak to the steward. Good-night, men."

He turned and left them.

Suddenly it was all over. The men stared at each other and then took their eyes away; was that all?

An empty feeling of disappointment came over them. Oscar left the group, where he had been standing right at the back while the skipper was talking; some more followed him, the bunch was breaking up and before they realized it they were slowly drifting forward.

The skipper would speak to the steward; all right, what more was there to be done? They were knocked flat by the skipper's tactics and they went back in silence, with a stoop in their souls.

By the forward bulkhead stood a little group of men with a grin on their faces — the boatswain, Chips, and the donkeyman. They were the petty officers, little Judases, who always have to keep in with both sides.

But there was someone else standing behind them in the dark alleyway, another one who hadn't kicked. It was Anton.

"Where the hell have you been?" asked Gustav, standing up to him. "Why didn't you come aft with the rest of us?"

A shy look came into Anton's face.

"I didn't want to make a row," he said quietly.

"Oh, you damned sneak, you!" cried Gustav. "If they were all like you the world wouldn't be fit to live in!"

He gave Anton a shove and walked quickly past.

60747

Firemen and deck hands parted and went to their quarters, but nobody took any notice of Anton; their eyes went through him and out the other side. He had broken the only commandment that holds at sea: Thou shalt be *game,* a shipmate among shipmates.

A shamefaced sense of defeat brooded over the forecastle. Now and again their spirits brightened up over the discomfiture of the steward, then the silence fell heavy and abject as before.

To-night the hands turned in early, and soon they were snoring peacefully, forgetting their grievances and all else.

VI

A WEEK went by and the *Mignon* was down in the fine weather. An azure world shone and danced and quivered and smiled, the sky was flooded with blissful blue and the ocean with its ten thousand waves outdid the sky in its extravagant depth of colour. And the sun sported with the little summer waves, and they playfully put up their lips to kiss the air, the eternal source of goodness and gladness.

The boundless space around became so intimately small, since infinity has no scale. All was sky and sea. A little strip of wake bubbled behind the ship, and round about gleamed a few friendly miles of water — that was the ocean. A bird flung itself about high up in the dizzy blue and the men on deck stared up at it — that was the sky.

But the *Mignon* was the dark, hard thing in all this placid azure. Her iron stem clove the amorous seas, and her black smoke left its smudge across these solitudes. And the days, on deck and in stokehole, throbbed away as surely and as regularly as the beat of the engines. The fairy world of the north-east

trades had no existence for the crew of the *Mignon;* the deck hands were chipping rust in the hold and the firemen dancing in front of the gaping glow of the furnaces.

But to-day Benjamin was called away from the brutalizing work of chipping — which still had a queer inbecile charm of its own — to clean brasswork on the bridge. It was Saturday, and nowhere is Saturday so much a preparation for Sunday as on board ship. So what could his heart do but expand and thrill with all the light and air of creation?

The bridge was deserted when he came up, there was no one but the man at the wheel. Sivert stood in solemn silence on the little step behind the wheel and did not take his eyes off the compass. It was all he could do to give his shipmate a nod.

Sivert had kept to himself since they left England. As soon as he came off watch he would crawl into his bunk and lie there with staring eyes, far away from everything. And at night, when it was his watch below, he would sit in the dark wagging his head to and fro between his hands.

Now he was like a dark shadow in the joyous daylight. But Benjamin was giddy with the delight of sea and sky; he rubbed away affectionately at the engine-room telegraph, gazing at the surrounding radiance.

The porpoises played along the ship's sides, their glistening backs darting forward over the surface, and suddenly one would shoot up from the water, a

golden shower fell from its firm sides, it arched itself for a second in an ecstasy of sunshine and then plunged back to its own regions in a line of infinite beauty. Hour after hour the wave-born creatures danced and played around the ship.

And sometimes the gentle little waves broke into a shower of sparks, as the flying fish came fluttering out. They stretched their great pectoral fins like two sails of tissue-paper, and away they dashed, like tiny quivering splinters of sunshine and green sea, far, far away over the waves.

It was a marvel, an unimagined glory to one who for days had done nothing but hammer insanely at a rusty iron plate.

After a while he had finished both the engine-room telegraphs and moved himself and his gear to the binnacle. This brought him to close quarters with Sivert; a nervous twitch passed over his friend's face, but he said nothing. Benjamin tried to find something to say, but his thoughts were paralysed by the muteness of Sivert's look. For a long time there was dead silence between the two, whose faces were so close together.

Then Benjamin gave a jump — Sivert had opened his mouth.

"Fine weather!" was all he said.

Benjamin was quite confused; he smiled and blushed at these two words.

"Yes, that's sure," he said. "You mustn't talk."

He was full of excitement and gratitude at Sivert's having spoken and he gave his heart to his friend as he had never done yet.

"Yes, that's sure," he repeated; "a man can't help being cheerful. It's too fine!"

"Yes, it's far too fine to feel blue," said Sivert, and something seemed to come away and drop from his face. A weak little hint of a smile appeared about his mouth and he let the sun sparkle in his dull, dark-ringed eyes. "It's been a hell of a time," he added, giving the spokes a vicious spin.

"You shouldn't take it so much to heart," said Benjamin as a man of experience. "It's you to-day and me to-morrow."

"Oh, you'll have to get a woman first," said Sivert with a pale smile, feeling himself infinitely his friend's senior.

Benjamin was reduced to silence. It was abominably tactless of Sivert to remind him of that when they were talking together like men!

So he said nothing more for a while, till the thousand dancing suns below, creatures of the great sun on high, had once more filled him with the joy of life and with kindness towards Sivert.

Then they talked on, about the ship's affairs, cursing the skipper and enjoying themselves.

But all at once the mate appeared at the top of the ladder and they were each intent on his job.

The mate was an immensely tall, weedy fellow,

with a small pale face which never stopped grimacing. Every instant he moistened his lips, sniffed, and blinked his eyes.

He fell upon the two young seamen: "May you both die and be damned," he fumed in his hoarsely piping voice, waving his thin, tattooed arms wildly; "you rub brass as if you were wiping tears from a corpse. And you, Sivert — you'll never see Tvedestrand again, I'll tell you that!"

His wrath quickly subsided, but not so his volubility. He had got going now and had to have his say.

It was his life's misfortune, this unhappy itch for hearing his own voice. There was not a thing he wouldn't chatter about to the helmsman, especially in the lonely middle watch: God, wife and children — one after another they had to be brought out.

He often felt ashamed of it as a degradation and a weakness. He would suddenly break off in the middle of a story and take it out by blackguarding his unfortunate listener in the most ferocious way.

They laughed at his yarns forward and despised him from the bottom of their hearts.

To-day his life seemed to depend on working himself into a fever over an adventure with a girl in Rouen whose name was Antoinette and who had got toothache one night. He sniffed and snorted and blinked, and the words gushed out of him: "So she jumped out of bed, you see ——"

"*Well, Mister Mate!*" cut in the sharp voice of the skipper just behind them, and the mate started violently. "What's the course?"

The skipper looked from his mate to the two deck hands with eyes which plainly said: "I won't have any familiarity with the crew!"

The mate turned red as fire and stammered a word or two.

But the skipper went quickly up to Benjamin, as if he would walk him down; then he stopped and took a handkerchief from the pocket of his snow-white ducks. He touched the polished brass with a corner of it. A suspicion of a speck came away. Then he held out the handkerchief to Benjamin, saying nothing, simply letting him see the speck — O Lord, would he never take that handkerchief away! For an endless while Benjamin had his eyes on it; but not a word, not a word, that was worse than anything. Benjamin could have murdered him. Then the skipper went below and the mate broke into a ringing curse: "May you die and be damned!"

Benjamin put his gear together and went down to the forward end of the bridge house, where there was a builder's plate to be polished.

He was still trembling from the skipper's eyes, those ice-cold eyes that could cut through a man's peace of mind as a herring-gutter's knife slits a fish.

But by degrees his excitement died down; the sun-

shine was too good, and wasn't to-morrow the blessed day of days!

But as he stood there rubbing the plate, he discovered that he could see into the skipper's room through the open port. The old sinner! he was pretty comfortable in there; leather chairs and stove and coloured lamp-shades, everything you could think of. And besides that he had a dining-room and a bedroom and a bath, all for one solitary man, while the nine of them forward had to pig together in a wretched little hole.

All at once Benjamin had a glimpse of a white shoe hovering in the shadow; it was the skipper coming down the companion.

He gave a start and began to rub feverishly, but still he kept an eye on the white-clad figure inside.

The skipper went to the table and sat down in a chair, sank into it rather. He reached out for something, a silver frame flashed, he was holding a portrait in front of him. For a long time he sat looking at it, motionless as a dead man. Then he pressed the photograph to his eyes with a sudden, violent gesture. The next moment he straightened himself like a steel spring; his whole frame seemed to say No! with a jerk. He put down the photograph hurriedly, and before Benjamin knew it the skipper was swallowed up by the darkness.

A wave of shame passed over Benjamin; he had seen something that nobody was meant to see, a heart

exposing itself and quivering, naked and helpless. The skipper was also human, with sufferings and longings, he was like all the rest, like Benjamin himself.

But why should he always be so cold and stuck-up? And all at once Benjamin guessed the tragedy of the *commander,* the immense loneliness in which he is forced to wrap himself in order to assert his authority over everything and everybody, and there are times when this is necessary.

It was not Benjamin's fault, but a little demon of spiteful joy began to dance within him; he no longer feared this little man as he had done, his heart would not cry "All hands on deck!" every time the skipper's frozen eyes pierced the air.

So the skipper had his weak side too.

Without his knowing it his hand slowed down over the brass plate.

He wouldn't say anything about it forward, he would keep it to himself as a sweet and mighty secret; who'd have thought it, the skipper ——

And suddenly Benjamin broke into song as he stood amidships.

VII

THEN nothing more happened.

Benjamin sat below in the vast hold, chipping rust with the others. For over a week the abyss had wailed under the furious blows of their hammers. From morning till night a hail of brown, crumbling rust fell on the bottom of the hold.

At all other times the hold was sacred and inviolate while the ship was at sea. Its womb was usually heavy with a precious burden of golden, glittering maize from the prairies, of black lumps of coal from the bowels of the earth, or of brown and fragrant beans, ripened in the moist sunshine of the tropics.

But now the air was rent with sharp and savage blows and the empty space swam in a tepid mist of semi-darkness. But a narrow yellow strip of sunlight swung restlessly to and fro with the roll of the ship, and high above, where the hatches had been taken off, there was a sharp square of dazzling blue sky.

A damp streak of thick rust told them that behind it there was a thing called the sea. How else should they know it?

Benjamin chipped away at the ship's side in a melancholy rhythm — so this was what they called going to sea.

Going to sea was rather a strong way of putting it, for what Narvik said the other day was true enough: that the crew of a cargo boat were more labourers than sailors. In sailing ships they had to think of wind and weather, watch the signs of sky and sea; but a steamer went straight ahead, against the storm or with it, in her irresistible power.

The sea is no longer a playground for swelling white sails. A narrow channel is all the steamships want. But the ocean is still there with its brutish instincts, more meaningless than ever, a vast and terrible image of the perfect folly of life.

It was more than summer now, but where was summer's sweetness? One day perhaps it was calm, the next it blew a gale, but the same infinite masses of senseless sea-water were always there. What was the use of it all? The sea works itself up into a howling rage, ships are lost, men are seasick, but why? When it has finished its furious self-contortion, it subsides again to collect its forces for a fresh outburst and rocks its huge belly in a nauseous, flabby swell, looking more idiotic than ever.

But all through the changing weather the ship holds on her blind course, immutable as fate. The sun rises and sets, the stars are born and die, but the ship goes on with the heavy, even throb of her en-

gines, without being able to conquer the everlasting circle of sea and sky.

Nobody believed in sober earnest that they would ever reach land again. Indeed Benjamin hardly believed he would ever come up from the hold. It had not been so bad to start with; then they had had safe excuses for getting up and shirking. They might want a drink of water, or break the point of their spike. There was nearly always some man running up or down the ladder on one excuse or another. Their thirst was something outrageous and the shafts of their hammers broke like matches. But now that devil of a boatswain had taken it into his head to fill the coffee kettle with water and bring it below in the morning, so they were not even allowed to be thirsty in this blasted hooker! And new hammer-shafts were sent down into the hold from the carpenter's shop; even that pleasure was denied them. So they were reduced to other shifts, but even those the blood-suckers couldn't leave alone.

They might have been so snug forward, four men in a row puffing at cigarettes, and what was ten minutes anyway? A thick cloud of tobacco poured out of every opening all day long. But one day even that was put a stop to. Anton had come up from the stokehole and wanted to go in, but they would have none of that! "Do you think I'm going to sit along with you?" cried firemen and seamen alike; "you can go and sit under the stars!"

The skipper had heard the row and passed word to the boatswain; so now there was hardly any way left of getting on deck, and at any rate all the cosiness was spoilt. Once, the day before yesterday, Benjamin had sneaked into the carpenter's shop with his file, which was as blunt as anything. But that didn't help him much, for who should be there to catch him but the boatswain himself?

"I'll sharpen your file myself," he said at once; "do you think we can all crowd into the shop?"

"Let the boy turn the grindstone for you," said Chips. "I've got something else to do anyway."

So Benjamin got five minutes' peace, and the boatswain began to get genial and yarned about the time he was boatswain on the passenger line to England and had a chance with the fine ladies in the first class when they were seasick.

But suddenly he glanced uneasily along the deck and jumped up. "Now you get below to your work," he said; "the skipper'll be on us any minute, and do you think we can all crowd into the shop?"

Benjamin had to go below again with a flea in his ear, but the boatswain stayed where he was, the devil.

But even a chance like that didn't come now; nothing happened at all. Their very features were obliterated in a grey, empty monotony. Day after day was the same, nothing happened.

Strange that men who see their whole day before them should care to live it. Isn't it more than enough

to see it, to know it? But a dull, brute instinct bends our necks under the yoke and we go on and on to the end of our days "to keep the machinery going."

Each of us stands at his wheel toiling and sweating and keeping it going, the noise of it roars over the earth till we are tired to death; then we drop, and fresh hands clutch greedily at the wheels and drive them on like madmen, on and on for ever, but why?

And they would all triumphantly answer as one man: we're keeping the machinery going!

The circle is complete, the folly is perfect. What a mechanism it is of human destinies, ticking and whirring for nothing at all, and so mortally afraid of coming to a standstill. But men eat and sleep and keep up their strength to go through with their watch, in the *Mignon* as everywhere else.

Each day was an eternity. From breakfast to supper-time was an interval Benjamin was unable to grasp. The midday rest shone in the distance like a promised land only to be reached after forty years in the wilderness. He could see it before him with the clearness of a visionary, but yet he was doomed to sit and chip rust through the sluggish hours.

What must the Jews have suffered, tramping about under the burning sun with heavy loads on their backs, while their tired feet slipped in the loose sand! They could see their land near-by, their thoughts crouched like tigers to spring upon Canaan, but the Lord made them wander for forty years and wear

themselves old and grey behind a barrier of nonsensical time.

Suddenly Benjamin gave a start. The bell was struck on the bridge. He stopped hammering a moment and heard it plainly. Ding-ding; Ding-ding! O dear, just one little stroke more, he begged. But no, nothing more, only a brooding silence.

It was only ten o'clock; O Lord, still two hours to twelve. Benjamin looked round at his mates; they too leaned their dull grey faces against the ship's side for an instant. Two hours more. Then all at once Risör wiped his forehead, raised his arm, and let his tool ring out against the iron. The noise had started again, the din that was to last for all eternity.

Benjamin wondered if it were true that he had once lived a life where each day had a complexion of its own.

He seemed to remember crossing a street once upon a time: a man he knew nodded to him and shouted something as he passed; but wasn't that the meaning and object of life? Girls went by, arm in arm, and he felt an acrid, vitiated wave of powder and perfume go through him to the very backbone. Melancholy horses' heads, automobiles, street-cars, foot-passengers — now, at this very second, they were about in the street! But no, the ship sailed on, no human power could bring him to land for many days. Here he was, boxed up, unless he liked to make

an end of it and pound his head to a jelly against the ship's side.

The very houses — they stand still on each side of the street, so grey and practical; but don't you believe them! A house is burnt down, nothing is left of it but a heap of rubbish; but a stone's throw up in the fatuous empty air a human couple once sat and were happy in their home. A violin has wailed in that quiet space, a woman has suffered, a life has come into being up there, where all is airy nothing. Is it not a fairy-tale, all this life which we call grey?

The seasons come and go, leaves and flowers burst out and wither, the snow falls and thaws, the year and the soil rise and sink again in an infinite variety, so that the heart never wearies. All that God created is very good; but he didn't create the sea.

Benjamin was hungry for the soil, he wanted to bury his face in the mould and feel the surge of spring against his skin.

Spring! — God, it was early June at home now, the air was sparkling and blue with sunshine, men held themselves erect in the bright weather and their faces were transfigured by the spring. The little girls went along the street with leafy boughs in their arms like young mothers with the first-born of the year, their bodies swaying as though to the strains of a distant orchestra.

And in the evening the dreamy white curtains would brighten the bluish indoor darkness and the

heart would be filled with a twilight lassitude, until one night it burst out like a bunch of lilac.

A mood of profound kindness spread within him and out of it blossomed Eva. Every day she came to him when his spirit was tuned to receive her. They went their morning walks, they sat undisturbed indoors; she was so near, so near. He felt her arms around his neck and the gentle sweetness of her kiss. Dear Eva!

Suddenly he noticed almost with a pang that there was silence in the hold — only the frail, desolate sound of his own hammer. Pedro, sitting next to him, extinguished a forbidden cigarette with infinite caution against the ship's side and hid it in his cap.

It was the boatswain climbing down the ladder. His shadow was sharply outlined in the narrow strip of sunlight that rolled backwards and forwards over the bottom of the hold. He jumped the last step or two and almost ran to the ribs where they were working. His steps rang hollow in the vast hold, where suddenly all was silence and suspense.

What was it? Another job of work or what?

They sat breathless and impatient. There was a curious expression in the boatswain's face, a smile of shamefaced glee. Without waiting to get his breath he called out with avidity: "Anton's killed!"

VIII

BENJAMIN'S heart stood still; what was it the boatswain said, was Anton dead? A dull despair settled upon him; but it couldn't be true, oh no, it's not true, he prayed.

But something had happened at any rate. The hands jumped down from the ribs and he found himself among the others crowding round the boatswain.

"How did it happen?" cried Manna.

"Was it just now?" shouted Leif.

"Did he fall?" asked Narvik.

And the boatswain told his story. — "Two minutes ago; yes, it must be two minutes ago."

A brief pause for reflection, then he spat with a reassured air and went on. "Yes, it's a matter of two or three minutes. Anton was going up the ladder from the stokehole; he'd nearly got to the top when he suddenly fell backwards with a shriek. Gustav, who was his mate below, had just time to jump out of the way — it was a narrow squeak, that's what he told me — when something dark came whizzing past with terrific force. It was touch and go Gustav didn't get him on top of him — yes, it was a narrow squeak, he

said himself. His head was smashed to a pulp. Then they carried him up on deck and spread a tarpaulin over him."

"Where is he?"

Oscar dashed for the ladder and the others followed him. The boatswain tried to stop them — "There's nothing to look at!" he cried. But there was no stopping them, they ran up the rungs like madmen and the boatswain couldn't stay still either, he climbed hurriedly in the rear.

Only Pedro was left bestriding his plank. He fished out his cigarette and lighted it again, shaking his head as the last shoe swung over the hatch coaming.

They invaded the bridge house, tearing along like a tempest. All at once Oscar, who was leading, pulled up short: what was it, had he found the corpse?

No, it was only the skipper and the chief talking together at the foot of the bridge companion. The skipper turned to the men with a look of astonishment and asked in a rasping voice: "Well, what is it, men?"

Well, what *did* they want? Oh, that cold voice — God, how they hated it, cowing and sobering them!

"We wanted to see Anton; there's no harm in that, is there?" said Benjamin with a threat in his voice which meant: The skipper can mind himself, let him go below and look at his photographs!

"That's for me to decide! And I don't see the

slightest reason for you to look at Anton," replied the skipper, fixing him with his icy blue eyes. "You can go below again and chip rust."

He made a little gesture of the hand which seemed to push the men aft, and turned again to the chief.

But at that moment Oscar caught sight of a crumpled tarpaulin lying over the bunker hatch. He simply couldn't restrain himself, but slunk across and peeped under the tarpaulin. There lay the corpse.

He beckoned to the others, they slipped quietly across and stood in a silent group round the dead fireman. The face was pounded to a dough of blood and flesh and bone, the brain was forced in and the head hung over queerly to one side; evidently the neck was broken.

But the hands were unhurt — uncannily alive they looked, with long black nails.

"What's the meaning of this, men?" the skipper's voice cleft through them. "I told you to go back to your work."

So the men went at last, with a touch of triumph in their hearts at having damned well had a look at Anton in spite of the old man.

When they were back in the hold, they stood in a clump talking excitedly. But their encounter with the skipper had taken the sting out of the terror, a tiny drop of sweetness was mingled with the disaster.

Pedro didn't trouble to hide his cigarette when he saw how things were, and Manna started a fag too.

"No, you mustn't smoke, men," said the boatswain with an anxious glance up the ladder.

"Oh, to hell with that!" answered Manna. The unwonted presence of death and the little score off the officers made them reckless of everything, of the boatswain at any rate.

He considered for a moment; he had no wish to fall out with the hands — all right, he'd take the risk.

"Well, for once in a way, men," he said graciously, pulling out his pipe.

Then their tongues broke loose properly.

"How could he fall? he must have been taken queer," they asked and wondered, and the boatswain repeated the whole time: "Well, Gustav said to me it was a narrow squeak he didn't get him on his head, those were his very words."

There was no end to the talk, and when they had threshed out every possible question and explanation to the last shred, they turned back to the beginning, nothing loath to go over it all again — "Well, but how could he fall?" — and to that the boatswain answered, "I don't know, but what Gustav said to me . . ."

Something had happened, an event had shown its ugly face in the midst of this tremendous void of pale grey days; they stood still and were terrified.

But everything has an end; after a while they stopped shuddering, their interest in Anton's death was taking a political turn. At last they were only

trying to delay the moment when an angry twist would come over the boatswain's mouth: "No, damn it, men, you must get on with your job!"

That was what made them keep it up and their instinct led them the right way: "It was a damned queer thing Gustav escaped," and the boatswain readily swallowed the bait: "Well, all I know is what he said to me. It was a narrow squeak, those were his very words. He came up to me; I was still standing on the grating looking down, and that's what he said."

The boatswain spread himself, proud of his information; he had talked to Gustav, the corpse's mate, he was a man to command attention.

"No, did he really *say* that?" asked Leif, who was a Stavanger man and spoke with immense emphasis.

But Benjamin couldn't be bothered to keep it up any longer.

"No, *did* he?" he flung out in the same tone, but so carelessly that the boatswain started. He scowled suspiciously at Benjamin and then said in a slow and sulky voice: "Now, damn it, men, you'll have to get on with your job."

They clambered up the ship's side again and their hammers began to thunder in the vast space. When all was in full swing once more, the boatswain quietly climbed up the ladder; he had to go up and talk some more.

Benjamin sat motionless on his plank and didn't do a hand's turn. He suddenly called to mind those mournful shoulders of Anton's, one evening he was standing by the rail.

A cold dread shot through him: did Anton kill himself, throw himself down? He might have found out that Aalesund was ill and that perhaps his sister was ruined — but no; that was not conceivable.

In that case he wouldn't have thrown himself backwards, but jumped overboard in the dark; he only turned giddy when he was coming on deck to heave ashes, that was plain enough.

But all the same, little by little a freezing horror stole upon Benjamin; he felt it moving in the darkness, it tore at his heart, his conscience was weighed down with guilt. He knew in himself that he could have hindered this senseless death, a clammy fear hovered about his lungs and called him murderer.

He is standing at Anton's side on the grating, looking down at a little speck in the stokehole, Gustav. Then he suddenly gives the other a shove, Anton turns a terrified face to him as he falls, his features are distorted in a death grimace, something dark whizzes through the air, Gustav has just time to jump aside — a narrow squeak, he says.

A dead lump lies at the bottom; but only a second ago a tender thought quivered twenty yards above, solicitude for a little sister at Bodö, has she got the allotment money yet? Oh, everything will come right,

you'll see. — And now. Never again will he have a thought, never again. An awkward sentence that was beginning to be fair is finished with a blot; there is no more.

And it is Benjamin who has killed him, but Lord Jesus, would that it were undone!

"You're talking bosh, Benjamin," he suddenly said, loud enough to make Pedro turn round; and Benjamin hammered away for a while and then stopped again.

No, it wasn't bosh; a blind horror dragged at his entrails — it was you who killed him. Was it the spectre of a murder he had committed in another existence? He did not know.

All at once he remembered his first night on board, when he failed to take Anton's part; then the night in South Shields when he sat in the galley full of cold malice, and the times he had contemptuously turned his back on Anton for not kicking at the grub. And he saw him standing at the rail with his mournful shoulders, gazing out, despised and infinitely lonely. But Benjamin made him still more lonely and despised. And he realized obscurely that he had murdered Anton every time he refused to show him kindness, every time he denied him.

He had a grudge against Anton, but what excuse was that? It is worse to betray Judas than to betray Jesus.

No questioning: here thought and reasoning were

brought up short. Here it was only a presentiment, a vague dread that raised its pale and terrible face out of the mists, whispering: There is no escape, Benjamin; examine your heart and you know it — it is not sorrow you feel for this dead man, it is the remorse of one who has had a mystical share in a murder. But how? Oh, the ways of life are dark, a mysterious force crouches within you and fills your soul with terror, reason stands still; what do we know?

Anton's blood was upon his head and nothing could be undone. O God, if he could go to him now and be a friend to him! O God, let it be all a bad dream and let me wake!

But no. Here death itself had taken a hand. The time for staking was past. The game was closed.

An immense desire to be good welled up in Benjamin, to sacrifice himself, to love.

But nobody can be good to a dead man lying on a hatch.

IX

THE men scarcely touched their dinner that day. A dreadful stillness faced the seamen when they came up after the noise of the hold. As soon as they stepped over the weather-board forward they felt the clammy breath of the grave strike on their hearts. In a constrained silence they entered the forecastle. There they found all the firemen. At other times there was constant war to the knife between the two worlds on opposite sides of the alleyway, a boundless mutual contempt. It was rarely that they paid each other a visit, but to-day was no ordinary day and nobody was surprised.

The firemen sat about on the benches, pale and scared, still reflecting something of the horror in their eyes. Gustav was talking. He seemed fearfully excited, wringing his hands with a pleading look.

"No, it wasn't my fault," he groaned; "I knew nothing about it till something black whizzed through the air and the blood splashed over me — here you can see the splashes. But I can't make out how he came to fall; perhaps he slipped, or maybe it was the heat. It wasn't my fault."

"Does anybody say it was your fault, Gustav?"

asked Narvik, fixing his calm blue eyes on the fireman.

"No, not exactly; no, nobody says so. I'd like to see who'd dare." A brief defiance flared up in Gustav and then went out again. "But Anton and I had quarrelled — oh, I was in the wrong; I said that if there were many more like him the world wouldn't be fit to live in. O God, O God!"

"Yes, you said that, Gustav," Fatty Mens corroborated from the darkness.

"Oh, you mind your own business; just as if you were any better. We were all as bad as one another, nobody spoke to Anton, nobody would answer him. Just because he was good and wouldn't kick. And now God has punished us and Anton is dead. Oh, gentle Jesus, help me ——

"We were in the same watch together for two years, nobody else had been on board so long as we had, we'd always been friends up to now, and then for this to happen. — Oh, Anton, Anton, why are you dead?"

"It'll feel queer and empty in our quarters now," said a little coal-trimmer; "uncanny-like."

"It'll seem so funny not having him sit down to dinner any more," remarked Fatty Mens.

"Yes, and to think he'll never lie in his bunk again," said another fireman.

They were doing their best to talk nicely and leave out the oaths; this made their words sound so strangely awkward and helpless.

"But the queerest thing of all will be never having him in the watch," said the little coal-trimmer.

But at this Gustav flared up. "You shut your mouth, Little Bekhardt, it was me that had been longest in the watch with Anton, two years we'd been mates; what do you know about it? Oh, we've had a lot of fun together, we were rare good friends, that's sure. And now he's dead and I'm left alone on my watch — well, I don't count you," he added with sudden spite.

"Had Anton been aboard as much as two years?" asked Manna.

"Two solid years," replied Gustav. "Now I'm the only one left of the crowd that signed on that time. Where are they all gone? Juan died of pneumonia in New York. Slasher Jens was left behind at Port Said when he was pretty near through. Kristian got a slice-bar on his hip that time in Leghorn; oh, they're all gone, the whole lot, killed and done for and disappeared in those two years, and there was only Anton and me left aboard.

"And now he's dead. I didn't know a word about it till something black came whizzing through the air, I just had time to jump out of the way, it was a narrow squeak. It'll be my turn next, I guess, and there'll be none of us left. . . ."

None left, not one. Here was a gang wiped out by the ship. Would their lot go the same way?

Benjamin stared about him, and a presentiment ploughed its way through the trembling depths of

his spirit, an obscure fateful feeling convulsed him; then a mysterious bubble of fear burst and his heart was as still as before.

"Anton's to be buried this afternoon," Sivert announced; "I've just come off the bridge. The second mate's sewing the corpse up in a tarpaulin. He's going to say the prayers when we let him go. The skipper wouldn't do it; he came up and said: 'I'm so lacking in the faith that I think it would be more natural for you to say the prayers, Mr. Christensen.' The second mate didn't want to at first, but that's the way it was settled."

"I've been told the old man's no Christian," said Manna, and at once there was a scandalized chorus: "Yes, there's no knowing what he'd be!"

"A bloody heathen," muttered Oscar, and his brown eyes bulged with indignation.

"No, look here, you fellows," interjected Narvik, the calm fair-dealer whose past fortunes were always a mystery to Benjamin. "The skipper's a dirty dog, that's sure, but he can be as much a heathen as he likes, we're just the same as far as that goes."

His words were received in surly silence.

"No, I'm damned if I am," Gustav blurted out; "I believed Jesus saved me."

"Yes, you're wrong there, Narvik," several more joined in. "We do believe."

In the usual way the deck hands always followed Narvik's lead, but this time they hesitated.

Oscar hugged himself with delight at seeing their idol deserted for once: "Well, anyhow I believe in God, I will say that," he declared.

Narvik smiled and looked at him.

"It don't seem to me you behave like Christian men exactly," was all he said.

"Ah, but you don't understand," exclaimed Gustav; "we swear and carry on and maybe we're like the prodigal son and go with bad women, but Jesus died for us and we shall be God's children in the end. If we didn't believe that, what would there be left of us? No, you mustn't talk of these things, Narvik. It's sheer nonsense what you say."

"Gustav is right," muttered the firemen. "You've no right to talk like that, Narvik."

But this was too much for the seamen, they wouldn't stand these God-damned firemen running down their oldest hand.

"There may be different ways of thinking," said Manna cautiously, forsaking his God a little at a time. "I've heard plenty of decent people agree with Narvik."

"It's a queer thing you fellows have turned so devilish pious all at once," said Sivert. "I don't know anybody who uses God's name so loosely as you do, Gustav."

"Oh, hold your jaw, you snot-faced son of a gun, you creeping Jesus," yelled Gustav.

He suddenly checked himself and Sivert gave vent

to a loud sniggering laugh. The other seamen couldn't help smiling and Gustav was furious.

Most of the men were not at all pleased at Narvik's making heathens of them, but the everlasting question for or against Jesus had suddenly become one of the many points at issue between seamen and firemen; all right, they had to show themselves game, and a violent altercation broke out.

Risör was just saying: "Don't you think Jesus had something else to do than die for a dirty fireman?" when the mate appeared at the door.

He threw an astonished glance at the excited faces glaring at each other in the dim light of the forecastle; then he said: "You're to come aft now, men. We're going to bury Anton."

A shamefaced silence fell upon the hands. They got up awkwardly and followed the mate.

The sky had clouded over and the sultry air was heavy with rain. But the sun still shone, falling upon the sea in slanting silvery picture-Bible rays, as if the Lord God himself would come sliding down them to judge the quick and the dead.

The captain and the other officers were already standing amidships. The corpse lay on a hatchway wrapped in the Norwegian flag, with ropes ready for heaving overboard. The engines were stopped for a moment, the ship lay still, pitching gently in the smooth rollers. All around stretched the grey sea and here was one of themselves to be committed to its

depths. Everything else was forgotten, death touched their hearts and filled them with the awe which is dark as the mould and as deep.

"You must take him up, men," said the mate. Narvik and Manna lifted the flag-covered bundle between them and carried it to the rail.

Then the second mate stepped forward and read the Lord's prayer. The men stood with bent heads listening to the organ tones of those beautiful, incomprehensible words. A memory stirred in their hearts, a vague murmur. Sivert was on the brink of tears, but, for all that, he showed a big, bright smile; he could never help smiling at a funeral.

Pedro alone was outside it all; he stood with averted eyes, picking his nose with a melancholy air.

In a flash Benjamin remembered that he had been through this before, he had stood on deck listening to these same words, while the same bright ocean waited with a low growl for its corpse ——

A distant memory stirred in his mind, a mood past understanding, a mystery which vanished again into the darkness that was its home.

"For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, amen."

The second mate stepped back. "Let go, men," he said in a low voice — "but handsomely now, lower him handsomely." Then Narvik and Manna eased the corpse down into the sea. A heavy roller came

up longingly, and with a soft gurgling sound it closed over Anton.

The men checked the rope with a jerk and an ugly grey tarpaulin slipped out of the flag. At that instant Benjamin caught sight of a dark yellowish shadow stealing up through the water — more followed, turning their frightful slanting smile upwards. It was the sharks scenting prey. They swam to the grey tarpaulin and fondled it. But Narvik hauled up the Norwegian flag. Even that Anton was not to take with him.

A voice cried within Benjamin that such was death, such and not otherwise. The flag could be used again, it was a fine new one; haul it up and let the corpse rot, "to dust thou shalt return. . . ."

But Anton was not even allowed to return to the dust; a grey tarpaulin lay rocking in the deep, till the sharks had ripped it open. And a something would float out and mingle with the boundless ocean.

But perhaps a dream would be left behind, a faint suggestion of poor Anton in the blue waves dashing against the palm-girt coast of Senegambia, when the Negroes plunged into the surf greeting the sun with cries of joy.

At that moment the engine-room telegraph tinkled on the bridge, the propeller began to turn, and every man went to his post.

There was only a fireman less on board, eight instead of nine; that would soon be put right; the ship sails on.

X

THE sky hung low over the waters, and big, melancholy drops fell with a faint hiss on the pale shimmer of the sea. But all at once the rain began in earnest, a lashing torrent, seething and spouting from air and sea alike; the whole world was transformed to rain, to a fantastic ocean that stood on end.

Benjamin dashed into the forecastle to take shelter. He had been hanging on the bulkwarks gazing over the sea like one bewitched. It had acquired a new and terrible meaning, full of mute horror, of the nameless patience of death.

He stood for a moment in the doorway of the firemen's quarters — dismal and cheerless as a house of death. Here the disaster had fallen most heavily, a yawning gap in the ranks was ever present to their eyes.

Who would be the next? which of them would the ship kill next? their pale, uneasy faces were asking in the silent darkness.

Now and then a faltering word broke the stillness.

"He was a game one, was Anton."

"A good shipmate."

And one of them would rock his head and say slowly: "But now he's gone."

The stillness fell on them again.

"Do you remember that time in the Red Sea? 'I'll take your watch,' said Anton."

"Yes, he was always ready to do a good turn." And again the voice from the darkness repeated its terrible refrain: "And now he's gone. . . ."

Gustav was lying motionless in his bunk, staring upwards with wide, feverish eyes.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," he whispered.

On Benjamin's own side the atmosphere was less gruesome, but there too the spectre of annihilation was abroad.

Stormy nights and shipwreck and the deaths of shipmates — it was the very saga of the sea that filled the seamen's quarters that evening, and every man had his tale to tell.

Even Narvik was carried along by the dark stream of memories which surged through their minds, mighty as a flowing tide.

"I was wrecked one time in the Pacific with a passenger boat," he said, and his eyes stared through Risör's face at something far away; "I was with a chum of mine, MacGregor was his name. We were from Yokohama and bound for 'Frisco. Then one night we ran on a sunken reef, tore the bottom out

of her, and the water came pouring in. It was calm, fine weather, but a panic broke out on board. There was a rush for the boats, one or two got trampled to death; it was an awful sight. MacGregor and I were standing together on the bridge, there was nothing for us to do, we were passengers.

"It was a rotten business, there weren't enough boats, some had to be left behind. It worked out that twenty of us were left aboard.

"It was queer to see the boats row off, we could make out the white faces in them far below, and then the darkness swallowed them. We stood at the rail listening to the splash of the oars and it gave us an odd feeling when we couldn't hear them any more. We felt the boat giving under us and we all thought our last hour had come. There were no life-belts and the wireless-operator could hear nothing. Then MacGregor said to me suddenly: 'Have you got a cigarette?' He was in a great state of excitement, tried to smile and couldn't.

"I gave him a cigarette and lit one myself. And then I remembered that the evening before we'd been talking about shipwreck and what we'd do if we were left on a wreck. 'I should smoke my last cigarette,' said MacGregor. I don't remember what I said. But now our words had come true, we were abandoned on a sinking ship. All at once MacGregor turned his face to me and it was pale as a corpse.

"'Now I'm smoking my last cigarette,' he said,

and again he tried to smile. But then he broke out into a shriek — 'But who's going to hear of it? Nobody'll know!'

"He tossed away his half-smoked cigarette and before I knew what he was doing he jumped over the rail. We heard a splash down below in the dark and then there was nothing more ——"

There was dead silence in the forecastle.

Narvik sat with his head resting on his clenched fist, gazing fixedly before him; his very face seemed a petrified memory. Then he looked about him in surprise: where was he, what was he doing here? And he got up, went to his bunk, and lay down. He drew the curtain.

The men sat round the table not knowing what to do; they were full of questions: how did he get rescued, when did it happen? But Narvik was not a man you could ask.

One by one they followed his example and crawled into their bunks. But Benjamin could not turn in, he simply couldn't stop romancing.

Oh, if only the *Mignon* might be wrecked, he thought, then he would find out what he was worth, whether he came up to the mark or was found wanting. But he had a misgiving that he'd be like poor MacGregor, who wanted to die with a fine gesture and be able to tell his shipmates about it afterwards.

The forecastle was too cramped for him, he had

to go out and take the measure of his antagonist, the sea. Sivert shuffled out with him.

They stopped for a moment outside the firemen's quarters. Gustav had raised himself on his elbow, they could just see his face in the faint light that filtered in through the port.

"Juan's dead," he was saying; "Slasher Jens is dead, Kristian got a slice on the hip; they're all dead, the whole crowd. And Anton was so kind, so straight, a real brick . . ."

But now Benjamin was full of other thoughts: of men who didn't get killed, men who died.

The rain had stopped, the sky flared up again and the evening sun fell on the deck. But suddenly it was extinguished in the sea and the deep night of the tropics came down like a curtain. The stars shone out, a twinkling myriad in the black dome of heaven. An ineffably soft air breathed through space.

They strolled about the deck for a while. The engines were throbbing with a subdued and friendly sound somewhere in the darkness. The red and green lights blazed under the white stars and the phosphorescence floated in a faintly golden glitter past the ship's side. Now and then they heard a tiny thump on deck — a flying fish that had leapt at the lights.

All at once Sivert spoke, with infinite deliberation. It must have been the night and the trade-wind that

had led his mind to things eternal. And these were his words:

"Is there a God after all? Narvik has been a long time at sea, you know ——"

Benjamin was going to answer, but then something happened. Somewhere far out in the coal-black night a streak of gold burst out, alive and bright; it flew towards the *Mignon,* sparkling with glory, with silver and gold and mother of pearl. It stopped suddenly in front of the ship and began to revolve, like a comet with a hundred stars in its tail.

It was a grampus playing round the bows. All life's beauty was in that golden streak, all the courage and pride of the heart. They stood still, breathlessly watching the friend of the waves till the ship's bell went. Sivert had to go to the bridge and Benjamin strolled aft with him, lost in solemn thoughts. Then he was left alone with the holy night.

A supernaturally distant music vibrated through the spheres and set him quivering. It was as though his heart had been given to drink of the wine of the stars. He stood by the rail staring down at the glittering path which the ship drew after her as she went. Every second fresh masses of sea-water rose under the propeller and shone in the darkness for a brief moment. Then the sea closed again, infinite and incomprehensible. But a new maelstrom continually came to life behind the ship as she went on.

Is life any different from this? We glow like phos-

phorescence for a little instant before we are wiped out and return to the dark sea. But a new wake is always happy to follow the ship.

Listen to the song of the engines. That too is like life. There, that beat that sounded just then, was you. You didn't hear it — the engines have hammered out many beats since then. Now the beat that was your life has died away long ago. The engines hammer on — fresh beats, fresh destinies pour out into the night, but don't give up hope — even your faint little beat was once ticked out into infinite space and perhaps awakened a pathetically tiny echo before it was lost in the void.

Everything perishes, but the ship sails on, ever going forward, with new wakes and new pulsations of the engines.

To-night Benjamin has an inkling of what the ship is.

What meaning is there in the fates she holds? They do not count to-night. In another instant other lives will drive the ship forward to the rosy dawn and the sunset, and those of to-night will have gone under and vanished.

The ship rushes on through days and nights, Anton is dropped into the sea, the crew leave her, others come aboard and leave in their turn, everything changes but nothing has happened — the ship sails on.

The ship is like the earth, and the earth has a

thousand ships. And what is the earth but a star on the face of the night? How strange that the earth should be a star among the thousand staring stars, that the foolish, fruitful earth should be a star staring back.

Leaves wither, life perishes, millions of dead are buried every year, but our own home, the earth, is a star which goes forward on its silent, inevitable course.

Then one night a man and a woman are standing together on a distant orb. Suddenly a shooting star falls across the deep velvet sky.

"Look at that shooting star," he says. "How beautiful it was. And surely it means good luck, good luck for you and me; don't you think that is what it meant?"

She does not answer, but clings closely to him and looks up into the face of her own. Her eyes shine with a soft gleam of amber as they close beneath his kiss, and both their hearts seem ready to burst with happiness.

But the shooting star was the earth going out.

XI

BEFORE Benjamin was properly awake next morning he had a feeling that something unusual was afoot. A vague uneasiness crept into his sleep, he heard a distant buzz of voices, tried to come to life but could not.

On getting his eyes open at last he felt at once that the forecastle was empty. Every nerve in him was aware that there was nobody in the other bunks; but why? Why had he not been called with the rest?

At that moment Sivert came in. "It's a good thing you're awake," he said. "I was sent to turn you out. You're to trim coal to-day; there's a man short in Gustav's watch and you're to give a hand in the bunker. You'll have a warm job down there! Early as it is, you could never walk barefoot on deck. But hurry up, there's fried fish balls for breakfast."

Benjamin flung on his overalls and jumped down.

"All right," he said, spitting three fish balls on his fork; "chipping rust or trimming coal, it comes to about the same."

"You're talking drivel," replied Sivert. "On a day like this it'll be a hellish job."

They heard the door of the firemen's quarters open and Little Bekhardt, the coal-trimmer in Anton's watch, appeared outside.

"You'd better come along, Gustav, there's nothing else for it," he said coaxingly. "You've nothing to be afraid of."

"No, I won't go below there again," cried a hoarse voice from within. "Just you go. Go, I tell you, or I'll kill you too."

The voice suddenly sank to a confidential whisper: "For it was me that killed Anton, you must know, me and nobody else, I'm not going to hide anything from you."

"Oh, hold your jaw!" said Little Bekhardt. "Why, I saw you myself standing down below when he fell."

"Oh, what do you know about it?" shrieked Gustav. "No, you're wrong, it was me and nobody else."

"Stop that blither," they heard Mens say. "Pull yourself together, man, and go below to your work."

Sivert and Benjamin stood in the doorway looking into the firemen's side. Gustav was standing in the middle, with a curious break in his body, looking as if he might fall forward at any moment. His face was pale as a corpse, his eyes vacant and stiff, an idiotic smile hung loosely on his bloodless lips. As he spoke a long streak of saliva dribbled on to his chest.

"Pull yourself together," said Little Bekhardt;

"it's just going eight bells, we ought to have gone below and relieved them long ago."

Eight bells rang out, in hard and regular strokes.

Gustav raised his head, listening. — "No, be quiet, do you hear?" he said. "Oh, you don't understand. Fatty Mens didn't get enough fish balls for breakfast, and Anton didn't either. That's what it is. Oh, God help me ——"

"He's off his chump," said Mens. "He stole Risör's hair-wash and drank it all up in the night. We'll have to get him into his bunk, there's nothing else for it. You go below and relieve them, I'll be there in a minute. I'm going to take Gustav's watch."

Little Bekhardt and Benjamin staggered out of the dark alleyway. The deck was sizzling under a white-hot sky, and the sea flashed with millions of stabbing rays.

They stumbled aft to the bridge house, blinded by the terrible light, with the hot iron scorching their soles.

"God, what a watch it's going to be," muttered Little Bekhardt as he escaped into the stokehole.

Suddenly Benjamin found himself on the grating where Anton had fallen down. A narrow ladder dropped sheer to the stokehole, where two white backs showed up in the dim light.

An immense heavy heat flowed about Benjamin as he climbed down the ladder. His hands slid cautiously on the greasy rail. Here it was that the black body

had whizzed past; he felt a shock of fear and his hand whitened on the steel rod.

The air grew hotter and hotter as he descended, at last a thousand-fathom sea of heat closed over him and weighed upon his shoulders with a terrible cushiony pressure. He had reached the bottom, he was standing in the stokehole.

"Why the hell didn't you come sooner?" cried a smeared and sweaty face; "we're ready to drop."

"It was that Gustav," answered Little Bekhardt. "What the devil was I to do?"

But the others were not listening to him. They reeled to the ladder and climbed to their rest, to their eight hours' respite before the next watch.

"You'll have to make it snappy in the bunker," said Little Bekhardt. "Here's a lantern. Good Lord, we're out of coal—hurry up!"

Benjamin took up the lantern with an open, hissing flame, and felt his way into the bunker. An abysmal darkness met his pupils with its downy touch and the coal-dust flickered with an almost audible hum through the over-heated air. But by degrees there came a sort of perspective in the blackness, a row of stanchions stood out, a mound of coal rose in the distance. The long voyage had made a drain on the coal, each day had eaten a little farther in, and now it lay a long way off.

A hand-barrow and a shovel showed where the other trimmer had left off.

Benjamin started throwing coal into the barrow. It fell on the iron with a harsh rattle which sounded strangely in this stupefying atmosphere where nothing could be expected to happen.

He flung the shovel aside and seized the barrow. It was difficult to steer, but he took aim at the little bright hole that led to the furnaces and ran towards it.

"You'll have to be a lot quicker than that," Little Bekhardt's voice cried up to him.

Benjamin ran back with the empty barrow. The sweat poured down him, his trousers were glued to his thighs and the coal-dust worked in everywhere.

Another barrow was filled and emptied, two, three, four ——

"Hurry up!" cried Little Bekhardt every time and Benjamin went back at a run. He felt the strength being slowly sucked out of his body by the dark heat around him. His back began to ache, his arms were getting frail and powerless, a terrible pressure bore down on his temples.

He seized the barrow again and ran with his head thrust stiffly forward like a wounded bull.

"Hurry up!" shouted Little Bekhardt.

Benjamin gave a deep groan. Then he rushed back, stooped down for the shovel and filled the barrow again; straightened himself, grasped the handles, and ran forward.

All at once he found the barrow was capsizing; he

resisted with all his force, for a terrible second the whole load hung in the balance, then the barrow fell over on its side and crashed against the deck.

A dull despair took possession of him; he could do nothing but stare at the heap of coal at his feet. Then he staggered back for the shovel, righted the barrow, and filled it again.

"Hurry up, hurry up!" yelled Little Bekhardt. And this time Fatty Mens joined in: "Hurry up if you don't want to stop the ship!"

He bent down again to the shovel and plunged it into the heap. But now he was half stunned with heat and tiredness and flung the coal aimlessly into the air; it was a long time before the barrow was filled.

"Hurry up!" they shouted from below. And suddenly Mens came clambering up along the streak of light.

"It's warm," was all he said, as he took another barrow and set to work. He filled three to Benjamin's one. But so long as Mens was there he didn't collapse.

"There," said Mens, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. "Now we're all right for a little while. Come down and get some lime-juice."

Benjamin stumbled after him. Little Bekhardt was dancing in front of the blazing chasm underneath a huge bulging boiler; his slight frame hung upon the slice-bar, the heavy iron rod which kept the sea of fire in order. He wriggled the slice out, slammed the furnace door, and opened another; plunged the iron

rod in and threw his whole weight on it. His face was distorted into a horrible grin, he yelled aloud, the heat was scalding him; then he pulled out the slice and flung it across the deck. With a strangely eclipsed face he reeled towards Benjamin.

"It's warm," he said. "I generally have your job, I'm a coal-trimmer. But this is too damnable."

He staggered away to the ventilator and took a tin pail that was hanging there, put it to his lips, and drank long and greedily. Then he handed it to Benjamin.

It was lime-juice, the acid thirst-quencher which thins the blood when it swells too hot and heavy in the veins. For an instant Benjamin felt the dawn of a cool September day within him and he almost became human again.

Little Bekhardt had placed himself underneath the ventilator; his hair was waving in the draught and there was a smile on his face. Then he went back to his work and Benjamin took his place.

A fresh, cool blast rushed down the pipe. It was impossible to imagine the flaming sun up above, where the cool breeze came from; so hot was it in the stokehole. There could be no greater joy than to stand there and let it blow through him to the end of his days.

But the coal was getting low, he had to go back.

A clock was ticking somewhere; he found it and saw that only an hour and a half had gone, there

were two and a half to come. He crawled up again into the bunker and stooped down for the shovel. Instantly it was as though he had had no spell of rest at all, the old tiredness dragged at his whole frame, he had been toiling at this job from all eternity. And there were two hours and a half before him.

He filled and emptied the barrow, twice, three times, four times, an infinite number of desperate times.

The heat was now worse than ever, it hammered in his pulse, it pressed cruelly upon him.

He thrust the shovel into the mound of coal; it was hard to get a hold, the coal resisted him and pushed him back. It rattled against the steel with a sound that set all his nerves on edge.

And suddenly, without knowing it, he cried out: "That cursed Anton! damn him, the swine!"

It was Benjamin standing in Anton's place and hurling curses at the dead man. He groaned out the imprecations as he buried his shovel in the heap of coal. "Damn him!" he repeated again and again; he hated him and wished he had never been killed. Then Benjamin wouldn't be here.

He staggered along with his load and again he heard the terrible shout that had been silent awhile: "Hurry up!"

It hit him like a whip, he rushed back and filled the barrow once more. He must not hear that cry again, he could not stand it.

But when he came back Little Bekhardt sang out as before: "Hurry up!"

His mouth hung open, sniffling in coal-dust in horrible short pants like sobs, his eyes were extinguished and his whole body dangled loosely.

He ran back and flung the coal into the barrow, quick as lightning.

"O God," he prayed, "don't let me hear it this time!"

But through the noise of his emptying the barrow he heard a distant voice: "Hurry up, Benjamin!"

A dull despair fell upon him, he could do no more; he dropped sprawling on the deck.

For a moment a vague fear tormented him: he mustn't go to sleep in the snow or he would never wake again.

"All the better," he said aloud, closing his eyes. A boundless peace expanded in his heart, a gentle breath caressed him.

"Hurry up!" roared a rough voice in his ear. He put up his hands to ward it off, but he had to get up. Then he crept on all fours to the shovel and managed the impossible — filled and emptied the barrow once more.

But that was all he could do.

Fatty Mens turned up beside him. "Go down and take a drink," he said.

And again a cool vision of heaven fluttered through Benjamin. He took his place under the ven-

tilator while Little Bekhardt stood by leaning on his slice, which was still red-hot from the fire.

"We've kept up her speed another day," he said; "there's only half an hour more. Perhaps I'll get Anton's job as fireman, it means a lot of money."

"You haven't the blooming strength for it," said Fatty Mens, jumping down from the bunker. His huge hairy chest showed dark under his singlet and the muscles of his arms stood out violently.

"That be damned," said Little Bekhardt. "Just because everybody isn't a heavy-weight like you."

"But what about your eye?" said Mens; "you were talking about going sick for it."

"Not now Anton is dead," answered Little Bekhardt, grasping his shovel.

He thrust it into the heap and sent the coal straight into the open furnace as easy as anything.

Benjamin went back to his darkness. Only half an hour more, he could manage that all right.

He was almost getting to feel a friendship for his shovel. But then the coal-trimmer of the next watch came up beside him.

XII

LITTLE Bekhardt and Benjamin crawled up the ladder and suddenly reeled out into the blazing sunshine. They had almost forgotten that there was anything else but darkness and instantly their pupils contracted with a dull pain. But a ghost of a breeze was stirring up here on the open deck and it trickled over their tortured limbs like a cool caress.

"O Lord," groaned Little Bekhardt, "I thought that watch was never coming to an end — to think that four hours could be so long. It beats me how Fatty Mens can keep it up. First he had his own watch from twelve to four last night, then he took Gustav's, and now he's going on with his own without a breather. I'd have been dead if I'd stopped below another minute. Not that I'm so tired, but it's this blasted eye. It throbs and hammers and pricks and it's full of aches and devilry. I'd like to know what it can be — oh, to hell with it anyway."

They dragged themselves forward and went to their own quarters.

"Here's our fireman," cried Risör as Benjamin

came in; "the ship's gone so fast since you've been below, it's quite dangerous."

Benjamin collapsed into his place, but he was too done to eat. He just sat staring at the others with dull, empty eyes and a crooked, mournful smile.

"You must have something to eat," said Sivert, feeling anxious about him.

Benjamin only smiled, it was such a trouble to speak. Then he got up heavily and went into the wash-house to be left in peace.

He got his clothes off, and his body was black with coal-dust. He started washing himself; it went slowly to-day, but by degrees he revived, the pores opened and gasped for air, the water flowed over his limbs bringing strength and refreshment.

Sivert put his head in at the door. "You must have something to eat, man," was all he said before disappearing again.

Two bells had gone already and the hands had turned to again.

Benjamin shambled in and hoisted himself into his bunk; his whole body ached with tiredness and in seven little hours he would have to be at it again.

He fell into a heavy doze and dreamt he was in hell and Satan praised him for his good stoking. Now and again a voice, a footstep knocked at his consciousness, then all was quiet again; but now he was back in the bunker, the coal came crashing down upon him; he was standing under the shoot in South

Shields, a terrific avalanche of black stone; he was carried off his feet, struggling, the coal buried him, all was dark.

Little Bekhardt was trying to dig him out, but he could use only one arm, he had to hold his right hand to his eye.

"Look here, Benjamin, aren't you going to get up?" he said, and the silliness of the question so surprised Benjamin that he woke.

Little Bekhardt was standing over him.

"You must turn out and feed now," he said. "In half an hour we relieve. This'll be your last watch; tomorrow the donkeyman's to go to the stokehole, the chief's orders. It'll do the blighter good, he only stands about in the engine-room and never does a hand's turn."

"How's your eye?" asked Benjamin, sitting up in his bunk.

"Oh, it's gone to hell," replied Bekhardt; "there's something behind tearing it to bits, something filing away inside my head. But it'll pass off — Lord yes, it'll pass off. But look here, do you know what the chief said to me? 'You're getting on, Bekhardt, the stokehole can't do without you.' So I ought to get Anton's job, don't you think? 'The stokehole can't do without you,' that's what he said. It's a hundred crowns a month more, I can put that by for the engineers' school." Little Bekhardt knew what he wanted all right.

"Yes, that'll be *bono,* as Pedro says," nodded Benjamin, jumping down to the deck. "How's Gustav?"

"Oh, damn him, he's lying there as sick as a cat. He won't turn to this evening, but to-morrow he's got to take his watch dead or alive, the chief says so. I say, Benjamin, 'the stokehole can't do without you'—that could only mean one thing, could it?"

"That's sure," answered Benjamin decisively, tying his shoe-string. "Is it salt cod for supper?"

"Is there anything else on board?" asked Little Bekhardt indignantly, making for his own quarters.

A little later the three watch-mates were strolling aft. Mens was taking his fourth watch that day, but he showed no signs of it. "As if that was anything," he replied when the chief said he beat the band.

It was still frightfully hot, but the evening breeze sent a breath of coolness along the deck. They loitered aft, there was plenty of time, ten minutes yet.

Up on the bridge house they stopped for a moment to look through the port of the steward's cabin. He was sitting on the edge of his bunk with a dull, vacant stare; the whole of his puffy red face seemed to take part in staring at nothing. The whisky bottle stood within reach. He had been sitting like that night after night since he got the porridge over his head. No, it's not good for a man to have too much to think about at sea.

While they stood there on tiptoe peeping in, the cabin-boy came rushing towards them.

"Come along," he cried. "What do you think? One of the hens has got chickens, you must come and see."

"What's he making all the fuss about?" said Fatty Mens, but he followed to the break of the poop all the same.

Here the skipper kept some fowls so as to have new-laid eggs and fresh meat at sea. They had always been the object of boundless scorn and contempt among the hands forward. One dark night Oscar stole a swanky hen and flung it overboard. That was the way to serve the old man!

But now a hen had got chickens.

Look — in the streak of moonlight the little yellow balls were tumbling about, piping and puling with tiny pathetic cries.

"My word," said Little Bekhardt, quite moved by the sight.

"What innocent little things they are!" murmured Mens.

A mystery was present: it was as though the ship herself had given birth. From out of this hard iron world which was so terrible to its human denizens, which slew so cruelly and shamelessly, out of this grudging naked iron there had come something alive, something tender and helpless.

Benjamin cautiously picked up one of the new-born chicks. It was such a soft little body, quivering with fear against his hand, he could not resist it; suddenly

he took the trembling little ball and pressed it gently to his lips.

An infinite tenderness welled up in him, a bright longing thrilled his heart.

And all at once he felt that it was Eva's eye beneath his lips, that it was the lovely delicate warmth of her eyelids that quivered under his kiss.

At that moment eight bells went on the bridge. Mens gently stroked the down of his chicken and put it back on deck among its little brothers and sisters.

"Now you must look sharp, you fellows," he said and ran along the deck.

Benjamin and Little Bekhardt ran after him.

XIII

A DAY or two later the storm was upon them. A howling cyclone bored its way into the sea and flung it up in its fury, the waves reared madly to the sky and fell again with a crash, while the air was shrill with flying spray.

The second mate turned them out at five o'clock. "All hands on deck!" he shouted through the door. "We must get in the life-boats."

He was in oilskins and sea-boots and the water streamed from his shiny clothes. His face was coppery from wind and spray.

In a second the forecastle was a confused tangle of men and boots and oilskins. Oscar, who had come aboard without any outfit, took advantage of the scramble to jump into Leif's fine new Lofoten boots. "They're mine," he screamed, though nobody had said a word; "we've got to get in the life-boats — no time to squabble about a thing like that."

And he rushed into the alleyway after the second mate. The others followed. Leif was green in the face, but he clenched his teeth; he was a plucky fellow. And by degrees the seasickness wore off, because he hadn't time for it.

It was not yet day, but a faint woolly gleam turned the eastern sky grey. The men crowded behind the second mate in the open doorway. A violent gust of wind and sea dashed against them in the alleyway. Outside the deck had vanished, the well-deck from the forecastle to the bridge was a mass of seething water, white with foam. Now and again the ship righted herself and poured the seas back into the thundering ocean to which they belonged, and then the derricks rose like yellow logs above the frothing whirlpool. For perhaps a minute they would lie a hair's breadth above the water, then another terrific wave would sweep over the ship and the derricks would again be plunged in the deep.

"We'll have to chance the derricks, men!" the second mate shouted back to them, and flung himself on to the spar, quick as lightning. Narvik, Leif, and Pedro ran out and followed him.

Manna held the rest back. "No, wait, you must wait!" he yelled; "we'll have another sea in a second."

With wonderful sureness the four men ran along the round, slippery spar. With a mighty leap they sprang over to the after derrick, but the sea came when they were half-way down it. A huge hissing wall rose on the starboard side, stood tottering an instant, then lost its balance and fell like an avalanche upon the ship.

Meanwhile the men were running along the der-

rick. The hearts of those looking on stuck fast in their breasts. Risör whispered: "Jesus, gentle Jes —" when the word was torn from his lips. The first three reached the bridge house and clung fast to the rail there as the wave swept over the derrick. But Pedro was still a few yards off. The sea swept him with it. But when the yellow, glistening spar again appeared above the swirl, they saw a pair of arms clasping the derrick, a head, a shoulder. In a flash Narvik was there, grabbed Pedro's arm and dragged him into the bridge house. As he did so another sea broke over the well. But Pedro was alive, he moved an arm, got slowly on his feet, and the mate helped him aft.

"Oh, thank God," gasped Manna. "I didn't think he'd manage it. Now it's our turn."

He stood watching the sea to choose the right moment.

Now it's our turn — a dizzy fear made Benjamin shudder.

"I'll never do it, I'll never do it," he said to himself again and again. He couldn't stand still, he would have liked to make a dash for it at once, to get it over. He looked at Sivert's face; it was pale in the morning light, but the eyes were full of spirit and resolution. But he could see that Oscar was mortally afraid, his big brown eyes wavered helplessly in his wan, distorted face. Benjamin felt a trace of sympathy for this other frightened man.

"Just you jump right after me, Benjamin," said Manna; "then it'll go fine."

"I'll jump behind you," said Sivert; "it'll be all right."

Benjamin thanked them in a rapid glance, and then his nerves were strung again to breaking point.

"Now!" cried Manna all of a sudden and heaved himself on to the derrick. Benjamin tumbled out after him and the next instant he had the narrow, slippery round spar under his feet. He fixed his eyes on the derrick a little ahead and ran after Manna.

Underneath him a witches' cauldron was seething, the sea dashed over his boots, but he dared not be afraid, all he knew was that he must and would get across. Suddenly he came to a halt, the first derrick was done. As he slung himself on to the second he looked around for an instant. The well was surging like a torrent, and outside the sea raged with the force of madness.

It was as though a world of swaying mountains crashed against each other and plunged into a roaring abyss, from which they arose as frightful dark monsters, licking the sky with their foam.

Benjamin ran along the second derrick. He felt he was going to manage it, he was sure of himself; oh, this was *life!*

The storm seemed to fill him with a wild ecstasy. "I'm alive!" he shouted to the tempest, and ran on with laughter in his eyes.

Suddenly he felt himself slipping, a dizzy chill ran through him, he was heeling over to the foaming deep. But at the same instant he felt two iron arms around him; they held him fast till he recovered his footing on the derrick. "Go on!" shrieked Sivert behind him. And he ran on, but now the bridge seemed to move farther and farther away. At last he got hold of the rail and clung to it for an overjoyed second; then Narvik helped him over.

A queer trembling fit came upon him, he could hardly stand upright and he smiled spasmodically. Sivert, with Risör hard on his heels, came over the rail on the lee side, just as a sea — the one which might have been *their* sea — broke over the well.

Benjamin grasped Sivert's hand in thanks for his help, and his chum said: "Chuck it!" as in duty bound.

Now they were all across; Christiansund was at the wheel, nobody was missing — yes, Oscar.

A cold horror struck them: was Oscar drowned?

But suddenly Manna burst out laughing and his laugh was catching. In the open doorway forward stood Oscar waving his arms. He pointed to the sea and to himself, and shook his head violently.

"Oh, get to hell," shouted Manna, "if you're in such a blue funk."

Oscar sneaked back into the forecastle. The second mate came up.

"That was well done, men," he said quickly.

"Pedro's got a cut on the head, but the captain's patched it up all right. Now for the life-boats. Where's Oscar? Forward? Oh well, let him go to the devil."

The men fought their way after him across the steep slant of the bridge house and clambered on to the boat deck. Up there the storm raged about them with a more staggering force than before; all they saw was three forlorn worlds, the poop, the bridge house, and the forecastle, left rising above the horror, while all around was sea and sky, a fierce and cruel warfare of the ocean's brutal forces, where summit hugged summit and one depth called to another.

The men lashed the boats fast to the davits with wire and heaving-lines, working with feverish rapidity; no one could tell when the sea's malignity might strike them.

Then all at once the second mate shrieked "Hold tight, hold tight for God's sake!"

A frightful sea, the most frightful of all seas, stood over them for an instant with an evil stare. Benjamin threw himself on the deck and clutched the bars of the galley skylight. He had no thought in the world but "Hold fast, hold fast, hold fast!"

Then a dark green deluge fell upon him with a loud crash above the roar of the surf, and a terrific pressure tore his hands from the bars; "I'm drowning," he thought, but without terror.

His mind was full of a murmuring forest; then all was dark.

XIV

THE water swished backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards over the deck where Benjamin lay unconscious. Now and again the ship gave a lurch which hurled him against the bulkhead, and a strip of surf foamed about him.

By degrees he came to his senses; he was aware of a table above him in the dimness and knew that he was in the mess-room amidships. All at once he remembered the sea that broke over him, roaring like a demon as it tried to carry him away. How had he come here and where were the others? He got on his feet with difficulty, his clothes stuck to his body like ice-cold, slimy leeches, and his brain was full of a dull, heavy buzzing. But he found to his surprise that he was unhurt.

The moment he got on his feet the ship lurched over on her side; the bulkhead seemed to fall over him, and with a crash he was shot against the door on the other side. Then the door kicked him back and sent him heavily against the table. He reeled into the alleyway like a drunken man and stumbled out on deck. A violent roll caught him and slung him

down against the rail — right into the arms of Manna, who was standing in the lee corner of the midships deck with the second mate.

"Mind yourself, Benjamin!" was all he said. "Don't go overboard before you have to. Risör grabbed you last time you went sailing across the deck; once is enough."

"We've got something else to do," said the second mate. "If you absolutely must go overboard, do it without taking up our time."

They turned and looked up in the air again. Risör was standing on the crosstrees, jammed hard against the mast by the wind; it seemed a miracle that he was not torn away and smashed to pieces as he swayed aloft in the blustering air, with the hissing spray dashing up to him. Every time there was a kind of lull in the hurricane squalls he ventured away from the mast; for an instant his arms were free and then another violent gust flung him back again.

Then Benjamin saw what he was doing aloft: one of the derricks had broken adrift from its forward lashing and the huge spar was plunging backwards and forwards with terrific force in the well. With a long whizzing swing it tore through the boiling sea. Like a fiend from hell it pitched about, crashing into wood and iron. At any moment it might smash the hatches and the sea would pour into the *Mignon's* hold. Risör had gone aloft to try to let go the top-

ping-lift, so as to check the derrick in its furious battering against the hatches.

For a fraction of a second he saw his chance of working, then another sea came down on the ship. Like a troop of frantic tigers with outstretched claws and foaming mouths the waves sprang upon the *Mignon*. She rose to meet them and defended herself for a quaking instant like a frightened schoolboy with his hand before his face — don't hit!

But the sea plunged over the bulwarks, the well-deck vanished, the derrick was carried aloft and dashed like yellow lightning over the hatches. It crashed against the woodwork, and the second mate turned white in the face: "Next time —" Benjamin heard him whisper.

But Manna had jumped on to the rail and in one spring he was well up the stay, making for the mast. Benjamin jumped after him, but before he got a hold of the stay the mate caught him by the leg and shouted: "What are you doing here? Do you think there's room for everybody aloft, you ass? Clear off below with the rest of the hands and don't let me see any more of you."

He shoved Benjamin along the deck and turned his eyes back to the howling sky, where Manna was swarming up the quivering stay.

Benjamin reeled along the deck, half dazed, and was flung backwards and forwards between the rail and the bulkhead.

It's no joke to be aboard the *Mignon* to-day, he thought with a shudder, tacking carefully. To-day the ship was nothing at all, a floating bit of iron tossed to and fro in the breakers.

The galley door swung and slammed with the rolling of the vessel and in the darkness within he had a glimpse of three figures. The firemen's watch lay in a heap in their drenched and sooty rags, with their hands clenched as though they still had hold of slice-bar or shovel. Their grey, grimy faces looked like cinders — oh, it was not only coal the ship devoured; men too were flung into the furnace and turned to ashes to keep her going.

A low groan broke from a half-open mouth, they had no strength for more.

They had not been relieved, as the forenoon watch refused to venture along the derricks. So they had been working themselves to death, till at last the deck hands had been sent below to take their place. That was where Benjamin was to go now.

A tremendous roll sent him to the stokehole grating and slowly he began to fight his way down the ladder. A cloud of sour steam poured up, through it he saw some forms rushing like madmen below him.

A foot of water was rolling over the deck and every time the slice-bars were drawn out of the furnace a shower of ashes fell into the flood with a hiss, and a grey steam rose from the water.

"Up into the bunker!" Narvik yelled to him through the din, but he could still afford a smile: "You're quite at home there, aren't you?"

Benjamin ran across the stokehole, splashing the water about him and crunching lumps of coal under his feet.

In the firemen's quarters forward the forenoon watch were sitting round the table, and Oscar was with them.

"It isn't safe to try and get along the deck today," said Gustav, appealing to the others for the tenth time.

"No blooming fear!" said Oscar. "It'd be sheer madness."

There was silence at the table, then Gustav started again: "Nobody could expect us to run along that derrick the way it looks now."

"I should say not!" Oscar agreed.

Suddenly there came a bellow from one of the bunks which made them start up from their seats.

"What the gaudy hell are you sitting here for? Why aren't you below?" It was Fatty Mens just waking up.

"Turn out and take a look at the well," was the sulky answer.

Mens tumbled out of his bunk and dashed into the alleyway. The next moment he was back in the forecastle. "You rotten skunks!" he exclaimed. "Get out

with you and relieve the watch. The derrick's all right."

"Try it yourself," bleated Oscar, the brave champion of the forenoon watch; "aren't you the man who stokes the ship all by himself?"

"Get out of this!" yelled Mens. "You smell of seaman!" And he chased Oscar out like a hunted rat.

Once more Mens turned to the other firemen: "Are you going, or aren't you?"

"What's it got to do with you?" asked Gustav, keeping his seat.

"I guess a damned sneak like you is always glad to get somebody else to work for him," answered Mens; "and you can go to hell. But it's got to do with the rest of us that the morning watch are working themselves to death below. If you fellows are not going, I am."

He slung his handkerchief round his neck and went out.

In a few moments they saw him land safely on the bridge house.

"We'll have to try it too," they muttered.

"Don't be such fools!" cried Oscar.

Mens ran along the deck, sliding down and fighting his way up, and the seas swept him off his feet for a moment, but at last he reached the grating. Just as he was going down he caught sight of the three half-dead figures in the galley.

"Aren't you in the stokehole?" he shouted at them, but it wasn't a question that anybody cared to answer.

"Well, who *is* below?" Mens shouted again.

"Seamen," came a whisper from the darkness.

Seamen! With a leap Mens was on the ladder.

"What are you doing here?" he cried out as he climbed down.

"Somebody's got to keep the ship going," came the answer with a sneering laugh.

The water splashed high around Mens as he jumped from the ladder.

"I'll teach you!" he yelled, snatching the slice-bar from Narvik. "Get back on deck and don't come messing with our job." He swung the long iron rod like a maniac, making it hiss in the air, and drove the deck hands before him to the ladder. "Up with you!" he roared, prodding Leif with the slice so that he dashed up with a howl.

"You were glad enough to get help when Gustav went sick," he called down to Mens.

"Yes, because Benjamin's a little sucker that makes no odds one way or the other," answered the fireman; "but I'm not going to put up with any more from your lot. I'd rather stoke the ship by myself."

And Mens opened the door of one of the furnaces.

"A sucker, did you call me?" cried Benjamin from the bunker; "sucker yourself!" He flung down his shovel and jumped to the deck.

Instantly Mens grabbed him and carried him wriggling to the foot of the ladder.

"I didn't mean it so bad as that," he said quietly, and then made up for his softness by shouting: "Will you get out of this and look sharp about it!"

But by this time the ladder was busy; it was the forenoon watch that had plucked up courage and was turning to.

A few minutes later the deck hands were sitting in the galley, each with a steaming cup of coffee. The firemen who were lying there had been driven forward by Mens, and by some miracle or other the cook had got the kettles to stay on the fire long enough to make coffee.

"Here's luck, men," said the second mate. "We've had a dose of it this morning, what with life-boats and derricks adrift and crazy firemen. When you've finished here you can turn in. There's nothing more to do and you've deserved a rest. Besides, the skipper says the cyclone's passing to the westward."

Benjamin sat with his cup in his fist staring out into the grey, spray-dashed morning, and he thought it had been touch and go. The loss of a second and he would have been lying somewhere in the seething deep, with the salt water bursting through his whole body.

Nobody could have helped him; the crew would have looked on and been sorry for him. But when they

had done their work they would have rolled into the galley and drunk their coffee as if nothing had happened. And a boundless joy and gratitude possessed him, because he was permitted to stay with the ship, as she sailed on.

The men drank their coffee and smacked their lips; then they climbed out on deck again.

A hint of sun showed behind the clouds. It was as though a God sitting somewhere had seen a pale, spectral disk rising out of the ocean far away in another world and had caught it in his mirror and thrown a little speck of light on to the eastern sky.

The dog Santos stood in the doorway barking a welcome to the hands as they came running along the derrick. He was so delighted that he didn't know what he was doing and jumped towards them into the swirling water. Then came a sea breaking over the well and swept him with it. They could see him struggling bravely, but in that foaming maelstrom he was doomed. His paws worked helplessly through the water, but he made no way.

Then it was that Sivert and Benjamin jumped together from the derrick. The water reached to their waists; they threw themselves forward and fought their way slowly through it towards the dog. Benjamin managed to grab him by the neck, but as he did so his feet were knocked from under him, a foaming, crested wave flung him into the green depths, but he did not lose his hold of Santos.

Suddenly he felt a hand strike him on the neck; Narvik had got hold of him as he was carried past the derrick. Just beyond him Manna was hauling Sivert up by the hair.

"Did you ever see such babies?" asked Manna with vexation.

"No, you're right," nodded Narvik, and both the elders were delighted with the two babies who were puffing and snorting, full of smiles and salt water.

At last the men tramped into the forecastle with Santos dancing among them. At the sight of them Oscar hurriedly jumped up from the bench and moved about with a fearful limp.

"I wrenched my foot," he cried breathlessly. "That's what it was."

XV

THE men sat at the long table under the lamp overhauling their gear. Trousers had to be mended, socks darned, buttons sewed on, there were a thousand things to be put right. The lamp swung gently with a friendly yellow flame, there was a cosy look about the scene, but outside the wind blew with a dark, melancholy wailing.

The storm had subsided, they had been on the outer edge of a cyclone, which had now whirled away to the westward to continue its work of destruction. The *Mignon* was pounding along steadily through the heavy sea, all danger was past, and, as far as human foresight could predict, they would be in Cape Town in a couple of days.

"It seems queer that we shall soon see land," said Manna, making a desperate effort to get his thread through the eye of the needle; "it fair beats me."

Again there was silence for a little while; needles were driven with a rasping sound through coarse dungaree, a piece of stuff was ripped up.

Then Risör came out with something, and he said it almost in a whisper: "We shall soon get letters."

There was dead silence in the forecastle. The men bent over their sewing and didn't look at one another; this went home to every one of them.

Those who generally got letters and those who never got them, they all had hopes this time — it was always this time. There was not one who did not expect his hope to be fulfilled, but they did not speak of it, that would have been presumptuous and have brought ill luck.

But Risör's words had called to life a world of longing and doubt and fear; they couldn't bear to sit under the lamp any longer; one after another they crawled into their bunks to be alone with their dream of letters.

They drew the curtains; there were only two left at the table and they said nothing, but all the same ——— !

They were something more than a bunch of men in a forecastle; something hummed in the air, intangible and inexplicable. With Risör it was the waves breaking against a wharf, with another the lilacs were budding in the park, somewhere else a little house shone with its fresh white paint.

They were only a handful of sailors, that was all, but still each man's native spot was the hub of the earth ———

Sivert and Benjamin were left sitting alone. Sivert had to turn out soon and his chum often kept him company when the evening seemed too long. And Ben-

jamin recalled the first time they had sat together at that table; he was sick of the ship then, now he felt that the forecastle was his home. But suddenly Sivert bent forward and his white shock of hair danced as before: "Yes, soon we'll get our letters," he repeated.

A wave of joyful longing thrilled through Benjamin. Letters, the letter!

Perhaps they wouldn't come the first week; at home they were never good at writing and the mail boat was not so very much faster than the *Mignon*. And he remembered his father's words: "No news, good news!"

But he knew there would be one letter waiting for him, and now there were only two days more, what was two days? Then he would hold in this very hand of his an envelope — Eva's letter. Not one, but many, many letters she had promised him on his arrival.

But all at once he gave a start; what was that Sivert was saying: "That's what I'm dreading; oh, it's awful!"

"But Sivert," gasped Benjamin, "what makes you dread your letters? Are you afraid something has happened at home?"

"No, it's not that — oh, don't you understand? Father and Mother will write as if nothing had happened, they will be writing to a different man to what I am now that I've been with women and all. And

then perhaps there'll be a letter from someone I know, the daughter of the postmaster at home, Birgit's her name. And it'll seem as if everything they write was not for me any more — that's what's so awful."

Sivert stared at the lamp with a forlorn, unhappy look.

"You mustn't talk like that, Sivert," said Benjamin; "I won't let you. Just as if you weren't as good ——"

But Sivert only shook his head and stared at the lamp.

A curtain was pushed aside and Narvik got out of his blankets. Benjamin expected some words of wisdom addressed to Sivert, for he must have heard their whispering. But Narvik walked calmly out of the door; "I'm only going to look at the weather," he muttered.

The others followed him.

A dark night lashed them with its blast, the stormy sky howled over pitch-black seas, edged with a foam of phosphorescence. The rigging sang a lament —, a hoarse and dismal hymn over the waste of waters.

Now and again a huge tossing shadow swept over their heads — an albatross heeling over in the gale.

"To-morrow we shall see land!" said Narvik, turning his face to port with an expectant look. He stood for a long time bending forward, scenting, watching, listening.

Then at last he said: "It seems to me there's a

faint smell, a little breath of green. My word, it'll be good to get ashore — to hear some news."

He turned and went quickly back to the forecastle. The two friends followed him faithfully.

"Are you expecting much news then, Narvik?" asked Benjamin.

Sivert gave him a warning punch; this was not good manners, what would Narvik think?

But Narvik, the mystery man, showed no annoyance; he smiled.

"I'm expecting to hear whether I can leave the ship," he said. "And please God it'll be yes."

"Are you going to leave the ship?" asked Benjamin, full of astonishment. "In South Africa? What will you take to there?"

Narvik was silent for a long, a painfully long while, and Sivert nodded to Benjamin — there, you see.

But Narvik turned to the two at the table. "I'm going to look for diamonds," he said calmly.

Benjamin's whole face became one bright smile as he stammered: "You don't say that! My goodness —— !"

"I have a brother down there," Narvik went on, made communicative by the other's enthusiasm. "He went there from Nome, where he'd been eight years digging for gold. — I was there six years myself and went home the year before last. He didn't find anything up there, he was just as unlucky as I was, only living from hand to mouth. But last year he won the

dog race at Nome, the biggest in the world, four hundred and four miles there and back. He ran with his dogs for seventy-one hours. The prize is pretty big, four thousand dollars. He gave up Alaska and went to South Africa to try his luck there. He hasn't found anything yet, but who knows?

"And I've been at sea since I came home, a year and a half — I'm an old shell-back, you see. I've stayed on board every blessed evening in port, denied myself everything, and now I've saved enough to go into partnership with my brother. I've written and asked if he'll take me. I wouldn't ask before, because I didn't want to be a weight round his neck. That's what I'm expecting to hear at Cape Town. Oh, I'll be glad to go prospecting again! You don't know what it is, nobody knows, nobody but me. It's more than food and drink, more than all the women you can think of, it's life itself to me ——"

Suddenly Narvik's face shut up, his eyes still sparkled. "Good-night," he said shortly and got into his bunk.

"Good-night."

But Benjamin lay a long time picturing in imagination the wonders that awaited him on the Orange River; a diamond glittered in the sun at his feet, vast herds strayed over the veldt and he lassoed them and made them his.

Life was a romance and there were only two days, two days more to the city of romance and his letter.

XVI

LAND, land!

There was a shout on deck and the hands jumped up from their supper. They rushed out to the bulwarks, where Manna stood yodelling with joy. "Look, look!" he cried, and the men followed the direction of his pointing. The sea stretched endlessly around, with its rollers shining in the evening sun. Everything was as usual, but all the same — something had happened, somewhere or other lay the unknown, a strange foreboding which confused the familiar picture of sea and sky. Ah, there ——! A faint blue haze hovered transparently on the distant horizon; there was the mystery, the glad derangement of the boundless waste.

It was Africa, a fairyland flashing with colour and stupendous with darkness, a pale strip of shadow that showed against the mighty, living ocean. Behind that chaste line on the horizon swarmed the flaming multiplicity of life. There was singing in the kraal to the plaintive twanging of the banjo under the palms, the padding of beasts in the mangrove swamp, a lonely watch-fire shone under the white stars of Rho-

desia. Mountains rose into the quivering blue air and swelling rivers flowed between dark murmuring jungles. An assagai flashed in the moonlight; a woman walked among the huts in the midday heat with her infant clinging to her brown, hanging breasts. And out in the great wind-swept desert lay the king of beasts tearing at the thigh of a young ox, while the breeze danced in his tangled mane.

Benjamin felt a strange weakness in the face of all these marvels awaiting him beyond the darkening sea. A breath of joy fanned every fibre in him, the song of life itself swelled in all his veins. He thought that hour must be stronger than death, it would be inscribed in letters of fire to bear witness long after his own life was quenched.

Africa, Africa! His youth thrilled within him with wonder at its fantastic wealth and beauty.

The long days at sea, the gnawing cares, were all swept away, leaving nothing but a rosy joy that spread its soaring wings towards the distant coast in the sunset. And he thanked the ship, the strong and generous ship, for all these glories.

His shipmates were flushed with the same wild transports, their eyes gazed blankly at the blue, and their faces were bright with a transfigured smile. They could not talk, but now and again one would stammer the single word "Africa!" Then there was silence again; their eyes drank greedily of the pre-

cious wine that had been denied them so long. Every man believed unfailingly that the land over there had something in store for himself, some strange surprise which would break in upon his life and fill it all with its marvellous light. Over there lay the meaning of their existence; they did not know what it was, they only felt dimly that the streak they saw concealed the miracle.

They hung on the rail, rigid with gazing, till night had fallen. A feeling of alarm troubled Benjamin when all was dark. The *Mignon* steamed on through a sea where all was as before, there was nothing to tell him they were near the land. Was it all a dream, would he wake again to the grey emptiness where days and nights flowed into each other making a melancholy expanse of nothingness?

But next morning when he sprang on deck he was dazzled by the sight.

So near, so near the coast was, scarred and full of glorious reality it rose into the sparkling blue sky. Yellow streaks of sand flamed between black ravines and rugged brown rocks. He made out the white lacework of foam along the endless beach and a frail little craft nodding under her sail among the smiling waves. And the morning shone so bright and cool over the world that it was like the first dawn, when God saw that it was good.

Benjamin had a job of work under the poop, but he didn't take much notice of that. Every moment he

put his head up through the open hatch lest he should miss anything of this day of days. Fresh mountains and plains sailed past, all part of this land of enchantment. But suddenly a bay opened out and a new shade of the sea's marvellous blue gleamed before him. And beyond it Table Mountain raised its broad and beautiful crest over Cape Town!

Already Benjamin could glimpse the houses through the light mist that hung below the mountain and make out the ships lying in the harbour.

A faint murmur floated out to him, the awakening hum of the city, its thousand-tongued chorus carried on the morning breeze.

"Get below and go on with your work, you young hound," shouted the mate from amidships, and Benjamin dodged below the poop with a laugh. But very soon he stuck his head up again. Close by, a mighty full-rigger swept past the *Mignon,* making for the open sea. Noiselessly she carried her fairy architecture, the least earthly creation of men's hands, a dazzling white dream towering to the very sky. And even the desolate ocean, which Benjamin many a time had hated so cordially, acquired a meaning through the splendour of the sailing-ship. Soon she vanished behind the point.

But the town was emerging from the mist, a church spire raised a waggish finger above the roofs, the streets ran up inland to the foot of Table Mountain, and the traffic rushed to and fro along the quays. A white motor-boat came skimming out of the harbour,

making for the *Mignon*. "Out with a rope, you ass!" shouted the mate, and Benjamin flung the Jacob's ladder over the side. A man in white tropical uniform came aboard and shook hands with the captain, and it was as though a signal honour had been conferred on the *Mignon*. He took his post alongside the wheel and gave his orders, short and sharp: "Hard starboard. Steady. Good."

They glided slowly past a great level space which stretched down to the sea from the garden city. The burning sun had scorched and stunted its trees, but still there was a hint of fresh green about it, filling Benjamin with blissful rapture. Some colts were playing on the grass, rolling over and enjoying themselves, and he thought he could catch the sweet scent of their smooth coats wafted out on the breeze. A boy was paddling on the beach and Benjamin felt an extraordinary interest in him; here was a new life after thirty days among the same men on the same sea. The houses ashore concealed mysteries which he burnt to know — there, behind those striped sunblinds, young girls must be sitting in white summer frocks, with hearts full of delicious secrets. And suddenly Eva was near him; she it was that he divined in all these gardens, she and no other. And in a few minutes he would be with her, they would have a nice time, as she used to say; for somewhere in the town her letter awaited him.

Then the anchor was dropped, the voyage was at an end, the *Mignon* had arrived. The captain went

ashore at once with the pilot. He had gone to get the mail, the cabin-boy explained ——

And then the anxiety and suspense weighed heavily on the ship's company. They had been six weeks away from Norway and much might have happened both of good and evil.

"Damn the letter I'll get," said Manna, to propitiate fortune.

"No!" Risör chimed in. "I'll get none either." He too knew that God rewards the humble.

Several of the others muttered that they didn't expect any mail, but all the same they sat watching for the skipper's return, mute with expectation. Sivert had gone white in the face. "I've never been so afraid in my life," he whispered to Benjamin. And a strange dread began to disturb Benjamin, but from another cause. What if there were no letter for him! From Father and Mother perhaps there would be nothing, he'd have to put up with that — but from Eva! If there were no letter from Eva — the letter he had been dreaming about in his fancy all these long days, the letter that possessed him —— He could no longer sit still on the hatch, but wandered restlessly about the deck.

"Sit down for God's sake!" cried Leif at last. "It makes me sick to see you going about like that."

Benjamin sat down and the *Mignon's* deck became silent as the grave. Pedro alone was unmoved. "Cape Town *mucho bueno,*" he said, yawning amiably at the town.

The others gave him an angry glance; "Shut up, you dago!" shouted Oscar, and to-day no one took Pedro's part.

Suddenly Narvik raised his head; his keen brown face scented something. "Here comes the old man," he said calmly, but all the same there was a slight tremor in his voice. The men rushed to the bulwarks. Far away a boat was rowing out; it came on incredibly slowly.

"Don't shove me," cried Risör, pushing Oscar aside.

"Oh, you won't get a letter anyway," Oscar sneered back.

"That's nothing to do with you, you softy," answered Risör, eyeing Oscar's frail figure with brutal contempt.

The boat came alongside and the skipper climbed aboard. He gave a little packet to the cabin-boy and went to his own room. The cabin-boy came forward towards them. Again the deadly terror sprang up in Benjamin's soul — suppose there was no letter. No, impossible; oh, it was not to be thought of. But suppose —— And suddenly Benjamin started something that was like a prayer: "O God, let there be good letters for me, only a single one!"

"Now keep quiet," he said threateningly to himself; "what's the use of praying *now?* No prayer can bring you mail unless the letters were written and sent from home three weeks ago. God has nothing to say to it now — either the cabin-boy has a

letter for me or he hasn't; nothing can change what he has in his hand. But, O God, let there be a letter ——"

The cabin-boy had reached the well-deck forward and the hands made a dash for him. "Is there a letter for me?" — "No, for me!" they all yelled at once.

The cabin-boy raised his white hand. "Keep quiet, you fellows, keep quiet," he said mildly.

"Don't torture me any longer," shouted Leif. "Is there a letter for me?"

"Out with the letters, you devil," said Manna hoarsely.

"Easy now, all in good time," said the cabin-boy with an indulgent smile which made Manna turn grey in the face. With a little grunt he settled himself on the hatch.

"Seamen's letters are only for — let me see —" the cabin-boy leisurely went through the terribly thin bundle — "for Narvik, Sivert, Leif, and Risör."

Benjamin grabbed the cabin-boy's arm so fiercely that he shrieked. "Where's my letter?" he said in a hard voice. "You're trying to scare me, you've hidden it. Quick, or I'll kill you."

The cabin-boy wriggled himself free and slapped at Benjamin with his soft fat hand.

"What a youngster!" he said fretfully. "No, no, no, I tell you! There's no letter for you."

XVII

BENJAMIN reeled into the forecastle and lay down in his bunk. His thoughts were paralysed, he could understand nothing. No letter; no, there was no letter for him. He felt sick, as if he had had a fall on a frozen road and smothered his face in blood and gravel. But Eva had promised — "I shall write and tell you how much I love you," she had said that last evening. And now there was nothing, nothing.

Little by little a bitter resentment against Eva grew up in him. He remembered all the things he had heard about her, he saw every detail of their three days with an unnatural keenness of vision. And for the first time he understood what she really was. It was he who had made up a beautiful dream and called it Eva, she herself did not exist. She herself was just a girl with a taste for fun, for the little things of life. Three days spent with a young man who was going to sea, that was just her mark.

"Where are you going, Eva?" her mother would ask. "Oh, it's this sailor boy of mine," she would reply; "you know, I'm a sailor's sweetheart now." And

the whole family had enjoyed her little jokes about her sailor boy.

But a week later Benjamin was forgotten, done with — a new friend made her cuddle herself in bed after a wild farewell at the garden gate.

Once more the half-forgotten words, spoken with a lascivious little laugh, sounded in Benjamin's ears. "There's a good deal of temperament about her farewells, I've heard."

Cuddle away, it was her look-out! He tore her out of his heart and trampled on her features. He had been an amusing little interlude in her life, for a couple of days he had set her sex thrilling, as she wanted it to thrill all the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year.

To hell with it.

He gripped her throat and strangled her till she was blue and ugly, then with a coarse laugh he kicked his feet in the air. But all at once his foot stopped still and he lay rigid. Down there on the table lay a letter which had not been opened. Perhaps the cabin-boy had fooled him after all and left the letter opposite his bunk? It couldn't be any of the others', all the four lucky ones had opened theirs long ago. Perhaps ——

A hope flickered through his heart and he fell on his knees before Eva. "Holy Virgin, forgive me," he whispered. Then he lowered himself out of his bunk and seized the letter with trembling hands.

But it was not for him.

All the same he did not fling it away in a rage, he stood reading the address again and again, and a bitter pang gripped him. In tall, narrow characters traced with pathetic care these words trembled on the little envelope: "*Fireman Anton Olsen, Norwegian S. S.* Mignon, *Cape Town.*" And up in the corner was an appeal with a wavy line to emphasize it: "*Please forward.*"

Nothing in the world was so homeless as that letter; Benjamin forgot his own misery and gazed intently at the message which could never be delivered and never be forwarded. A little woman had sat down many thousand miles away and written of her sorrows or her joys to a brother who was the only one she had to confide in.

But the addressee was unknown; some shreds of grey tarpaulin were floating somewhere out on the Atlantic, and the letter drifted away like a poor little snow-flake, without meaning, without aim. Please forward ——

At that moment Sivert came in with a beaming face. "It's from Birgit," was all he said. "You know, I ought not to be happy, but I can't help it."

He crept up into his bunk and read the letter for the tenth time with an overjoyed look in his bright face.

Benjamin felt envy lurking in his heart. Sivert got his letter, but not he.

And again he was seized with unreasoning anger; he tried to find a bitter word that might spoil Sivert's happiness, but his friend's smile put him to shame. Cain could not slay Abel to-day.

He went on deck to the others. They were sitting in the sun as before, unnerved by the bitterness of their disappointment. Risör was sitting by himself scoring a line with his thumbnail on the tarpaulin, over and over again. Benjamin went up to him.

"Didn't you get a letter?" he asked quietly.

Risör gave a scornful laugh. "It was a bill sent after me," he said with clenched teeth. "I'll kill the blighter who sent it on."

"A poor joke that," said Benjamin, but he felt more cheerful for Risör's not having had a proper letter.

"I should say so," muttered Risör, drawing another line with his nail.

"But do you know if Narvik got a letter?" asked Benjamin presently.

"He's amidships now getting his discharge," answered the other. "He must have had good news. Well, some of us must have the luck."

There was a shade of resentment in his tone, the first bad feeling he had shown towards Narvik.

Then he suddenly raised his voice and called across the deck: "Come on ashore, you fellows! We'll let this dung-barge go hang for a bit."

"Yes, come on," shouted firemen and deck hands, and they shuffled in to change.

Shore-going clothes were pulled out of chests, brushed and beaten, with curses at the moths — no, a man should never ship aboard a lousy dug-out like the *Mignon*. They ran around in their pants searching for collar-studs; who the hell had taken them? they were here a minute ago. Pedro dodged about with his razor and took the beards off them and they thanked him with a slap on the back: "Pedro *bono*, fine, fine — son of a gun!"

With a thrill of joyful recognition Benjamin took his blue suit out of his chest, a wonderfully living reminder of home, of another world. But then he remembered the last evening he wore it, and he felt it like the cut of a whip — no more of that, he would murder that memory. He would trample it in the mud and walk on, cold and hard.

At last the hands were ready; they brushed one another and looked with surprise in their pocket mirrors. Every man had blue clothes and brown shoes, that was the rule, and their smartness almost made them bashful. Then they were away amidships to draw some money from the mate.

"You're going ashore after women?" said the mate with a sniff of comprehension. "How much do you want now, men?"

The seamen contented themselves with five pounds

apiece, but they could hear the firemen asking the chief for as much as ten or twenty.

Then the whole gang made for the shore — all the hands forward except Sivert, Narvik, and Gustav. Narvik was packing his gear, Gustav was sitting up in his bunk with a prayer-book, but Sivert stood at the rail watching the others leave the ship.

"You aren't going ashore, are you?" he said to Benjamin. "Let's stop on board and make egg-flip."

"That be damned," answered Benjamin with his foot on the ladder. "You'd better come ashore too."

"No," replied Sivert; "I'm going to stay on board and read my letter." All at once he looked with concern at his chum's face and said hesitatingly: "You may read it too, if you like."

"It isn't my letter," said Benjamin curtly, taking his place in the boat. They started to row towards the quay, but Sivert called to him from the ship: "Be careful, Benjamin; mind yourself. . . ."

Leif sat in the boat whistling frightfully out of tune with joy at his letter. "I never thought I should hear from home," he said; "I don't generally have any luck. We must have a drink on the strength of it."

The others said nothing.

At last they stood on the quay, with solid ground under their feet for the first time in thirty days. The noise of the engines still hummed in their ears and

the sea's desolation haunted their eyes; a spree was just what was wanted to blunt it.

For a few moments they stood irresolutely and avoided looking at each other. The town roared around them, strangers hurried past, street cars jangled, motor-cars tore along the asphalt, bicycles dodged each other at a furious rate. They were just a little knot of men in blue adrift in foreign parts. Nobody knew them, nobody loved them, they had had no letters and were bitterly disappointed; and the foreign town thundered about them. But they were shipmates, they were the *Mignon* push ashore, that was what they were. And for the first time Benjamin felt that these men were his only world. Betrayed by those at home, a stranger in Cape Town, they were all he had left. Benjamin had come under the law of the Ship: he would show himself game with his shipmates in good and evil. The sea had got one man more in its grip.

XVIII

THE men walked slowly along the street with the curious straddling gait peculiar to sailors going on the spree. The boatswain and Manna walked in front, then came the others in a forlorn-looking bunch. People turned round with a smile when they saw the strange group.

"Where the hell are the pubs in this blasted place?" growled Leif. "I've such an unholy thirst on me."

The sun shot down between the houses, sending people slinking away to the shade of the awnings. It was like fighting your way through a flood of molten lead if you didn't jump from one island of shadow to another.

In the middle of the street stood the policemen in white tropical dress with topis, motionless as pillars of chalk.

At last a sign blazed its golden welcome and they tumbled in through the swing-doors. "Beer," gasped the boatswain, and the lady behind the bar smiled upon them. "Sailors?" she asked brightly as she pulled the handle.

"Sure," replied the boatswain, flattered at her attention; "we're from the big Norwegian steamer *Mignon*."

"Really?" said the lady, pushing the glass towards him. "Norwegian? Oh yes — Norway and Sweden. But your English is ever so good."

"She's real jam," whispered Oscar.

"Oh, shut up, you goat," said the boatswain, devouring her with his eyes. She had a pale face with big, mare's eyes behind thin reddish lashes, and her coarse, insatiable muzzle flaunted a pair of moist and flabby lips. The men ransacked her firm throat with greedy eyes which bored like gimlets into the dazzling whiteness that shone above her low-cut blouse.

"Here's luck, boys," said the boatswain, raising his glass. Ah, what luxury to bury one's face in the soft, ice-cold froth! "Whisky," grunted Manna, and they drained it at a gulp. They had to try and raise their spirits, and after a bit they felt at home, full of laughter and fun. They began to fool about with the barmaid, leaning over the counter and admiring the silk calves that swelled below her skirt, where the fine black open-work showed up the white skin.

"Fine woman," they whispered to one another with desire veiling their eyes. Each man had his eye on his neighbour and they all growled at the boatswain: there were limits to that kind of thing. But now the bar began to fill up and the girl suddenly leaned over the dripping zinc counter and looked

with a mischievous smile at the *Mignon*'s crowd. Then she pointed to the boatswain and said just one word: "You."

They understood at once what she meant; the others stole out looking small, but the boatswain was left sitting on the sofa with a fatuous smile of victory.

Another bar was stormed, more whisky, whisky all the time.

A man came up to them with a mouth slimy with beer froth. His lips were more like lobes and there was a fawning look in his pale, perspiring face.

"Scandinavians?" he asked.

"Norwegians," replied Manna, throwing out his chest.

"I'm a Dane," said the slimy one. "I've been on the bum here three months. I know Cape Town like the seat of my pants. If you'd like to see some pretty things, you stick to me — pretty things, eh?"

He prodded Manna in the ribs and winked mysteriously.

"Don't touch me, you Dane," growled Manna. "But you can come along if you like."

Another bar, more whisky.

Pedro and Benjamin sat together at a little marble table while the others were racketing round. Pedro was quieter than ever, staring at vacancy with big, melancholy eyes. Then he groped for his glass and drank with avidity. He was getting quietly and re-

flectively drunk, and suddenly he laid his head on the table and his shoulders twitched; Pedro was crying.

"What is it?" asked Benjamin, nearly sobered at the sight.

"O Anita," Pedro whimpered in his hoarse voice. "Pedro never more come back to Anita. Pedro come back Cadiz and Manuel in Anita's bunk. Manuel no good shipmate, *mucho malo*. But Anita fine, oh plenty fine, and Pedro never more, never more——"

Pedro wouldn't go any further with them; he ordered another whisky and sat at his table weeping over his lost love. But the others rushed off to fresh bars, as though some noisy, garish roundabout were swinging them along, singing and shouting. With flushed faces and flashing eyes they were caught up in a wild escapade which knew nothing of the *Mignon* and all its devilry.

The slimy one began to bum money from them and drink had made them generous. "Here's ten shillings for you, but I'm going to toe your backside first!" said Manna.

And the Dane let him kick away; his yellow teeth gleamed in a servile grin and then he clutched at the money.

And one after the other they all had to have a kick at their new Danish friend.

On again, more bars, more whisky.

By this time there was nothing in the world they

weren't up to. Risör upset a fruit barrow, sending a flood of oranges all over the pavement, and they ran for their lives down the street, the blood beating in their ears; this was grand fun, they ran on and on through deserted alleys. All at once the Dane called a halt: "Now we're safe," he cried, and they crowed over their exploit.

But suddenly a pillar of chalk appeared at the end of the street, tense excitement struck its claws into them once more, and it was a sight to see the cool way they strolled off, till the Dane found them refuge in another bar. Some of them had got lost on the way, there were only six left. But these six drank each other's healths and they were all the best fellows on earth. Risör fell on Benjamin's neck. "Good chummy," he hiccuped; "you's a hell of a good chummy."

His vacant eyes stared at Benjamin without any look of recognition and he smiled idiotically. And Benjamin patted him on the shoulder and assured him he was one of the best; oh, it was all grand fun.

Presently Risör had to go out and be sick. He tottered in again, green in the face, with the landlord at his side raising Cain. They stopped his mouth with a pound and hailed a taxi for the man who was knocked out.

Now there were none left but Manna, Oscar, Mens, and Benjamin.

"Shall we go and take a look at the girls?" suggested the Dane, who was the only sober one of the party. "There are some pretty things, real pretty things."

"Damn it, yes," bawled Mens. "Now I'm ready for women."

"A drink first," babbled Oscar; "just one more."

They lurched into a bar and drained another glass. But Oscar dropped into a chair, his eyes closed and his throat began to rattle. Suddenly he collapsed on to the floor with a crash, crept along on all fours, but was incapable of getting up.

"Let him lie," said Manna; "he'll wake time enough. It's Sunday to-morrow."

The others went on.

Benjamin stuck to them; why the devil shouldn't he be in it? he had to sample this too. Nothing human should be strange to him. Nobody cared for him anyway, neither Eva nor his people at home. And an obscure sense of duty told him he must go where his shipmates went.

A thousand reasons for sticking to the party ranged themselves before him. It was just as when the alarm-clock called him out of sleep at home, his whole dream fell into line with the ringing, it made the only possible conclusion to the rarest of visions. So it was now; all his thoughts took one shape, to stick to the others.

They had reached a slummy quarter, loafers and

hooligans scowled at every corner, and half-naked girls leaned out of the windows and hailed them.

The Dane knocked at a door and after a little while it was opened. A young man with a white, famished face and a lock of hair plastered down on his forehead was standing in the dark hall. A drawn look about the thin lips told Benjamin that he was a cripple.

The man limped in front and they entered a big room thick with the fumes of beer and tobacco.

A lot of girls were lying about the sofas smoking. The Dane went up to them and whispered something. Then some of them went out and three were left. " One each," said the Dane with a smirk. " Real pretty things." He got a pound from Manna and disappeared.

The man who let them in limped over to the piano. He hammered out a wild fox-trot and the girls came nearer. A big blonde in a loose wrap went up to Benjamin.

" I love you," she whispered, nestling up to him.

A vision of Eva thrilled through her kisses, and he hugged her in his arms. But this wasn't Eva, and why the hell should she come into his thoughts? It made the caress such a bitter one.

They sat on the sofa, a bottle of port was brought, they drank and smoked. Her name was Rita, she said. Benjamin knew someone at home whose name was Rita.

The name was like tearing canvas, like a shooting star cutting across a cold autumn sky; a harsh and wonderful name, he had once called it.

And now ——

The pianist dashed his thin fingers on to the keys and another nigger dance shrilled out its frenzy. Manna and Mens were each sitting on a sofa petting their girls.

"Don't tell," cried Manna over to Benjamin. "This is life, what?"

Suddenly the music broke off, but the pianist did not leave the stool. A new melody wailed out into the room, making Benjamin's heart sick. It was Solveig's song he was playing — everything that was tender and delicate and lovely. It was like a dream hearing it in this place, like the melancholy longing of the light summer nights murmuring a greeting from home.

"Stop that," shouted Mens; "play something lively, curse you."

The pianist understood. He smiled a bitter little smile, and the next moment the Sheik strutted forth in rhythmical carnality.

Benjamin breathed more freely and finished his glass. A thrill of pain had been on the point of checking him; now it had passed off. But the Sheik was beginning to pluck at him, the East was spurring his blood. Rita put her arms round his neck and hung upon him. "Darling," she whispered.

Manna and his girl had disappeared. Rita got up.

"Come," she said.

Then the pianist limped over to him.

"You mustn't," he whispered; "I tell you, you mustn't."

His eyes shone with a strange gleam beneath his moist forehead. Benjamin didn't know why, but he suddenly guessed a love-affair between Rita and the lame pianist.

But life was not that kind of romantic stuff, it cheated you and disappointed you — to-night he was on top. Now it was the pianist's turn not to get a letter. — Benjamin smiled back scornfully: "Oh, go to hell," he said, blazing with defiance.

XIX

EARLY in the grey dawn Benjamin tumbled out of the house. A pale morning light brooded over the town; it was raining. The streets were deserted, there wasn't a soul to be seen. The houses leaned wearily against one another, asleep, and the windows stared at him with vacant eyes.

He stumbled along down towards the quay. So that was all. He attempted a scornful smile, but could only manage a strange grimace. That was all. Now there was nothing more. Something had burst in his heart and left a bitter emptiness.

So that was the mystery, the star above the lives of men. His feet dragged heavily along the asphalt as he struggled on from one quarter of the town to another, covering many miles. A heavy weight pressed upon his head, a sheet of copper was stretched tightly against the roof of his mouth, poisoning him with its taste ——

He staggered to some steps and sat down. He remembered what Sivert had said the other day about being another man, a new Sivert who had no right to

letters from home. But Benjamin had not become another — not even that. Everything was as before; he had simply been initiated into a vulgar, trivial secret, which left him poorer, or perhaps richer — richer for a disillusionment. His last dream was gone and life had no riddles left. That was all.

A vague wistful anticipation of something sacred had been taken from him. This was what he had imagined was going to be the explanation of everything, the beacon amid life's meaninglessness, the atonement for death's terrors, the tremulous joy of his poor years on earth.

But to make up for it he was admitted to the mighty ranks of male animals, whose memories sting each other's nostrils voluptuously; yes, Benjamin had become a *man*!

He brought his fist down on the stone step and gave a hoarse cry of pain. Then he got up and went on, talking aloud to himself, swinging his legs mechanically, as he stared at the asphalt.

"But good Lord," he said, "this doesn't count one way or the other. Everything must have a beginning; sooner or later I should have had my disappointment; why not now? Who cares what the devil I do? Eva? Don't be silly, Benjamin; you've been fool enough up to now. But when once I get home, then we shall see. Oh, just you wait, my little friend. Perhaps I can let you down some day, one good turn deserves another. You knew me when I was nice and young and soft, and you didn't care about that.

Good; now I've obliged you. I've done what you wanted. I'm not wax any more, I'm as cold as stone. I've learnt something that'll please you. You shall have a he-goat to play with, not a fellow who yearns and dreams his life away and gets let down for his pains, but one who knows what he wants. And one day you'll get left to cry yourself grey because you didn't know when your hour had come, and let me stray about outside in the dark. Then it'll be my turn to walk past you. And I shan't take any notice however much you implore me. 'It's too late, my little friend,' I shall say with a piercing smile; there was a time —— 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. Oh, I shall crush you ——"

All at once Benjamin pulled up and said in a trembling voice: "No, you mustn't cry, Eva; oh, don't cry, dear, they weren't true, all the horrid things I said, I'm fond of you all the time, I love you so — I've been bad to you, but don't cry, it's you I love and nobody else in the world. Only you, only you, dear, sweet little you."

His voice broke with emotion, but then he stamped on the asphalt. "Shut up, you ass," he said in a hard voice and walked on.

No, he was not ashamed of his night, not a shadow of remorse darkened his spirits. Good Lord, it had to be, every dog must have his day. It was only the disappointment, the bitterness of it, that rankled with a restless pain.

Oh, life was a poor contrivance, it was a wretched

bait we wriggled after, till the unknown fisherman hauled us up with a cruel jerk and knocked our heads against the gunwale.

Without knowing it he had reached the harbour. The stillness of infinite desolation prevailed everywhere, not a sign of life was stirring on the quays, the ships loomed darkly in a strange and cheerless peace.

A man was sitting on a barrel. He got up on seeing Benjamin and came quickly towards him. It was the *Mignon*'s boatswain.

"Are you here too?" he said. "I can't find a boat to take me aboard. I've been sitting here close on three hours. There isn't a soul to be seen on board."

Benjamin looked out and saw the *Mignon*'s well-known lines standing out far across the harbour.

"We'll have to wait till somebody wakes up," he said, taking a seat on one of the barrels.

The boatswain sat down beside him. He had grown so curiously old in one night, Benjamin thought, so unaccountably battered and worn. A drooping line was drawn about his mouth, his eyes were dull and lifeless, his head hung down on his chest. And Benjamin wondered how he looked himself.

"Women?" he asked, turning his gloomy face to Benjamin.

The other nodded.

A gleam of curiosity stole into the boatswain's

eyes; he began to cross-examine Benjamin, digging for details to gloat over.

"Now shut up," Benjamin cut him short. "I don't care to trot out anything for your amusement. If you must run after women at your time of life, you should have some stories of your own to tell."

"Shut up yourself," shouted the boatswain; "who said you might give me lip? I'm your bo'sen and this is none of your business. And I'm not the only one that'll be done for, you'll be old yourself some day. And then I'll be sitting in hell and laughing at you, you silly owl."

"What have I done to you?" asked Benjamin meekly.

And suddenly the rage was extinguished in the other man's face, his features collapsed like a heap of ashes, leaving an old man behind.

"What have you done to me?" he repeated dully. "Nothing, Benjamin. It's only that I got mad, that's all. It's so hard to grow old, that's what worries me. And I've got nothing in the world left to me; I'm bo'sen aboard a ship, where everybody comes and goes except myself. Oh no, it's not a good thing to grow old. And I can't help it if it hurts me to see you so young and full of life. But be careful of your young days, I tell you, they're the best thing you have, the only thing. Look at me: I've nothing to look forward to or comfort myself with. I've made a mess of my life, I've gone from one woman to another,

they've given me what I wanted — ah yes, I have a lot on my conscience. But there's not one of them left, nobody cares for me, I'm always in with a new lot of people and they don't like me any better amidships than they do for'ard. If only there was somebody waiting for me at home. . . ."

A boat came rowing out from a pier and Benjamin hailed it. Two big Negroes were pulling at the oars; they waved and came towards them.

"Now we'll be able to get aboard," said Benjamin.

The boatswain glanced at him rapidly and said with hesitation: "You won't blab, will you?"

"What do you take me for?" replied Benjamin, jumping into the boat. The Negroes gave a huge white smile and shoved off.

The foam surged about the bow as they made their way across the deserted harbour. A cool breeze stirred in the morning air and Benjamin was seized with a sudden longing for the ocean, the free, strong ocean, violent or gentle, but always infinitely pure — and he remembered a swelling mass of white sails scudding past towards the open sea.

A man stood by the rail looking at them as they lay to. It was Narvik.

"It was a good thing you came; now I can get ashore," he cried, shouldering his sea bag. "I was just looking out for a boat."

The other two came up the ladder.

"Well, good-bye, boys," said Narvik.

"Are you off now?" asked Benjamin.

"Yes, I'm to have a go for it," Narvik smiled with beaming eyes. "It'll be a funny thing if I don't catch hold of some luck this time. Well, good-bye again."

And he got down into the boat. Benjamin stood and watched him.

"Good-bye, Narvik, and good luck to you," he cried for decency's sake, and the other waved back. But in his heart he muttered — "You fool, there's no such thing as luck. Only hope and disappointment, nothing between."

He gazed at the boat till it was only a black dot in the distance.

One more man lost to the *Mignon*. But to-morrow another would come aboard — oh, life was never euchred — every man's place could be filled, the automatic machine never ran short.

Now he couldn't see the boat any more. He turned and went slowly into the forecastle.

XX

BENJAMIN opened his eyes reluctantly and the lids were heavy to lift. He had dozed away the day and now it was getting on for evening. The forecastle was silent and deserted, he was alone. In the course of the morning they had warped in to the quay and all the rest of the hands had gone ashore. As if it was worth it! he thought, gradually letting himself get back to the shabbiness of life. Last night squeezed its dull and flabby face against him and made him sink back wearily into the blankets. But suddenly he sat up in his bunk, staring stiffly at the bulkhead, as a memory flashed through his mind.

He remembered his first night aboard, his dumb and impotent despair at the ugliness of existence. He heard Aalesund's snarl at Gustav, as he crawled into his bunk with Anton's sister. "Oh, go to hell!" were his words.

But now he had heard those words once more, and it was himself who flung them at the lame musician. Now he himself was Aalesund; it was not he who was shocked — he was the bully, the monster. Life

had played one of its scenes over again, a new spiral had wound its way upward, and now he found himself looking down into it.

"Oh, go to hell!" he had said, and the cripple had stood aloof with his love. He had bought a pound of flesh, cut with a brutal hand from a quivering heart.

"Nobody on earth is viler than you," he whispered to himself. "But once you were different, weren't you? Yes, you were; you dreamt of being good to your love, of keeping her smiling through the years. And now you are a pool of slimy scum, a disgrace to the good earth."

Then all at once he clenched his fists defiantly. "You're not a boy, damn it all!" he said roughly. "Life has hit me, I'm not a softy who turns the other cheek. I hit back and it isn't my business to see who takes the knock. God can look after that and turn it all for the best, as he's so good at doing. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, that's the law, the strong, hard law of life."

"You idiot!" he said to himself; "*you're* not a man, you're a coward who buys a living soul for a few dirty pieces of silver. And you know that there's something a thousand times greater than being a male, something you'll never reach in that way, and that is, a man. A frank and fearless will that doesn't throw more mud into the world than was there before."

He lay like this a long time, while his thoughts

were thrown backwards and forwards, knocking each other down and always getting up again. But at last he could stand it no longer, he was sick and tired of himself, it was all so useless.

The stillness of the forecastle began to frighten him; it was a stillness made up of many inaudible sounds, as though annihilation itself lay darkling in the low room. He was almost afraid to be alone and hoisted himself out of his bunk. He went into the firemen's side to look for company.

There were two sitting at the table, Gustav and the cabin-boy. Little Bekhardt lay motionless in his bunk listening to them. His face showed white in the darkness.

"Yes, I'm one of God's children and I'm not afraid to say it!" Gustav confessed.

"Hallelujah!" crowed the cabin-boy, casting an evil eye at Benjamin.

"Come to Jesus, come to Jesus!" cried Gustav to the new-comer; "I'm saved, look at me!"

Benjamin looked at Gustav and didn't feel any particular desire to be saved.

He strolled out on deck.

The ship's iron side lay close against a quay, an abyss of darkness, scored with the white stripes of the arc-lamps. Now and again a few forms strayed into the glare and were swallowed up again by the night. But the darkness beyond was alive, astir, with he knew not what. The hum of the town surrounded

the *Mignon,* a noise of people and traffic, a hint of low delights, a whisper from the harbour taverns.

But the ship lay so calm and serene, she was the world everlasting, where every man had his bunk, at sea or in port, and soon she would shake the follies of the land from her sides and let the men live alone with the blessed ocean, with the storm, the dawn, and the solitude.

Benjamin felt an infinite kindness for the ship this evening, no harm could reach him there. A calm, firm step was coming along the quay; it was not often a man walked past with a step like that, at night-time.

A face showed for an instant under a lamp — a mask of determination, inhuman in its severity. It was the captain coming aboard. He stood for a moment at the rail, staring defiantly at the town. One could imagine him stamping his foot on the deck — "You won't bring *me* to my knees!"

Then he went into his cabin, to the dead solitude within.

Benjamin almost loved his skipper to-night; he was as strong, as sure of himself, as the ship he commanded.

Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder; Little Bekhardt was standing behind him.

"It was so doleful in there," he said.

Only these half-dozen commonplace words, but he said them with an unaccountable accent which made Benjamin turn round and stare at him. Little

Bekhardt's face was ashy grey and his features were distorted in a strange grimace which suggested to Benjamin a circus clown in deepest distress.

"What is it, Little Bekhardt?" he asked quietly. "What is it? answer me. What makes you look like that? Didn't you get Anton's job, aren't you going to be a fireman?"

"No," said Little Bekhardt, half averting his face. "I'm not going to be a fireman, I'm not going to be anything at all, there's only one thing I'm going to be." His voice broke into a sob and he shrieked out: "I'm going to be blind!"

"Don't say that, Little Bekhardt, don't be so cruel!" groaned Benjamin. "Say it's not true, say you won't be that."

"Yes, it is true," faltered the other. "I went to the specialist yesterday. I'm rotten all through, the optic nerve is attacked; first I shall go blind and then I shall go mad. Last of all comes the only good thing. Then I shall die."

"It's the dire disease — you know what," replied the little coal-trimmer. "I got it in Lisbon when I was a boy of seventeen. That's five years ago; I let it rip, and here I am."

A quaking fear shot through Benjamin. He was no longer absorbed by his pity for Little Bekhardt, whose terrible fate now whispered a "perhaps" to Benjamin himself.

Rot.

Little Bekhardt went on talking, with a harrowing tone in his voice.

"I'll make good use of it, the little while I have left," he said with a hoarse laugh. "It's like at cards, the joker takes two more with him. I'll see there are some more blind men besides me; oh, Little Bekhardt's dangerous now. I'll have some company, by God I will!"

"You dare!" yelled Benjamin with a wild cut at his arm.

"Don't, Benjamin!" whispered the other, bursting into tears. "You know I didn't mean it. Only I'm so desperate, you see — oh, Jesus Christ, what shall I do? You mustn't think I meant it, I wouldn't hurt anybody on earth."

Benjamin was still trembling at the frightful threat Little Bekhardt had flung at his own misery.

The other waited for him to say something, but there was only a brooding silence. Then Little Bekhardt shuffled back to the forecastle.

Benjamin stood looking at him. And again pity took hold of his soul without the ghost of a thought of himself.

Poor, poor fellow, the ship had hit him most cruelly of all. From day to day he would go on waiting for his own dissolution. In Little Bekhardt's place there was only one thing he would do — make an end of it all.

Poor Little Bekhardt.

He would go in and be kind to him, propose his favourite game, a kind of cribbage, while he could still see.

A horror, dark and threatening, seemed to rise with icy breath from the iron plates of the deck as Benjamin went forward to the forecastle.

The ship was no longer the safe, everlasting being he had thought her.

The *Mignon* had raised her iron hand and struck.

XXI

NEXT day the letter came.

Benjamin was amidships scraping paint when the second mate beckoned to him. "Letter for you!" he said. "Oh, these lovers — " and he held out a flaming yellow envelope. But Benjamin hesitated to take it, he stared with mortal terror in his eyes at the paper in the mate's hand. He dared not touch it, he had no right to call it his — O God, how well he understood what Sivert meant. This letter was as homeless as Anton's; oh, a thousand times more.

It was a tremulous prayer, a dying smile of kindness, addressed by a human soul to its own murderer.

Nothing could be undone; the letter was no longer his.

His eyes never left the silky little piece of paper; he stood as though paralysed before the mate.

"What the devil is this?" he heard the other say. "You take a hell of a time getting your letter. Run away for'ard and read it. But look sharp!"

Benjamin took the letter as cautiously as if he

were afraid its yellow flame might burn him. Then he went forward. He laid the letter before him on the table and stared at it. Her funny boyish writing sprawled across the envelope and the stamps stood gaily on their heads; there were three too many, a meaningless row of them right across the top.

But it had come too late, it ought to have come the day he was trembling with the joy of anticipation. Not with impunity had he plunged in the mire and ridden on her delicate white neck.

But now he saw quite clearly all the accidents and misunderstandings that might have prevented the letter's reaching him at the proper time; in fact, it would have been quite incomprehensible if it had come before, he thought.

What could there be in the letter? He had a presentiment of something tender and wonderful — little words that would have fluttered about his heart and made it blossom. Now they would fall on stony ground — nay, they would be like glowing sparks in an open wound.

"Damn it, it's not too late!" he exclaimed — "what on earth are you thinking about, what are you working yourself up for? Don't take it so beastly seriously. Be sensible and put a curb on your nerves and do the only thing you have to do — open the letter."

But his hands shook as he opened it.

" Dear, dear Benjamin,

" Do you know that I'm lying here in bed writing to you? Everything is new and white about me, the carpet, the chairs, the wall, everything. I feel like a tiny little angel girl. I'm so lovely and tired and sort of weak. No, it's nothing serious, just a cosy little ailment which will soon pass off.

" But now I think I deserve a nice little talk with you. O Benjamin, you don't know how I have missed you, didn't we have a lovely time those three days in the spring, only it's strange how long ago it is. It was so sad that you had to go away, I was really awfully sorry. You ought to be here now, Benjamin, it all looks so lovely. I can watch the green leaves swaying outside and the sunbeams shining in on all the whiteness. There's a sweet little sunbeam on the bed and just this moment I'm putting out my hand to it and it makes it so warm and transparent. Can you feel how my hand is, Benjamin? Oh, you ought to be here now, my dear, dear boy, and then I would stroke your hair.

" But I quite forgot to ask how you like the sea? Is it very dreadful to be an ordinary seaman? Oh well — you get your wages the same as I get mine. Is Cape Town lovely? I expect you're going about sunning yourself and looking at all the pretty little nigger girls, only don't be too false to me, please.

" Would you like to hear a wonderful piece of news? Fancy, I'm to go to Paris in August and stay

there a year. Aren't you glad? But now you must make haste and come home and be good to me the time I have left. Then I shan't forget you, and when I come back I'll squeeze you hard and tell you that 'the most amusing thing about Paris is the little places that the ordinary tourists never find out.' Do you know the style?

"But now do you know, Benjamin, I'm so awfully tired that I'll say good-bye. Dear, dear boy, *ich bin so froh in dich,* as my little sister says. Good-night! I'm kissing you just here, and when you get this letter you must kiss me back. Will you promise that?

"Your Eva."

Benjamin formed his lips into a kiss, an infinitely bashful and touching caress. Then he smiled, but there was a lump in his throat, a tear trembled on his cheek. "Dear, dear Eva," he whispered, "that you should be fond of me, even after this ——"

Yes, but she didn't know anything. Well, never mind that, a wave of glittering sunlight had poured into his heart and danced there brightly. All was now so white and shining, the world was one bewildering kiss, and more than that he was not to know.

He got up and began to walk about the forecastle. He raised his arms above his head and laughed at an imaginary sun, he was so young and happy. Strange that a little scrap of a letter could do so much.

Oh, it was no letter, it was a dear and boundless

world that had floated down to him, it was the song of birds and green trees and drifting summer clouds. It was all that was beautiful and pure, it was Eva.

It was the resurrection morn, and darkness still brooded over the earth. Then the sun broke forth through the night, a gleaming blue sky hung above all, and the risen one herself laid her arms about his neck and whispered: "Kiss me, Benjamin——"

There was no more sin, no more sorrow, his spirit was golden with the wonder of Easter morn.

No stone had been rolled away from a grave, nothing had happened but a letter. Nobody was to be forced to believe it, it was only in Benjamin the miracle had come about, but it was as strange and as wonderful for all that.

Oh no, it was a thousandfold more, a scrap of paper had done more than the book of books, had made him so white and good.

He would begin a new life, to the day of his death he would atone for the evil he had thought of Eva, the base things he had done. She should remember every year as an infinitely tender and exquisite caress, she should never feel herself growing old, his love would carry her along a fragrant, beautiful road towards the sunset. And if she died, his heart must stop in the same hour. Such would be his love for her. No one in the world should have such love as she.

Benjamin's heart swelled in a boundless tender-

ness and he thanked Eva in dazed and meaningless words. O God, how happy he was, how happy!

The door-handle turned and Benjamin gave a start. It was Sivert.

"Oh, are you here, Benjamin?" he said in a strangely sheepish way; "I didn't think there was anybody here."

He began to rummage among the cups in the locker. "No, I can't find it," he said half aloud.

"I say, Sivert, I got a letter to-day," said Benjamin presently.

"No, did you?" Sivert turned round and his face was beaming. "I'm so glad, Benjamin; you made me quite afraid, you looked so fearfully desperate. And now I may as well tell you, I wasn't looking for anything in the locker, I only came in to read Birgit's letter. I had to come in all of a sudden and have a look at it; I know it by heart, you see, but there was something I didn't seem to remember."

Sivert felt under his pillow and pulled out his letter.

So they sat down, each at his end of the table, and read their letters over and over again.

But at last Sivert pulled out his watch and said with a sigh: "Well, now I suppose I'll have to turn to and do a bit of work or else they'll come and fetch me. You just stop here, they won't notice that one of us is away."

"No, you stop here," said Benjamin; "I've been slacking longest."

"Not a bit of it," replied Sivert; "I've read mine much oftener than you. You've only just got yours."

"Then we'll both go," said Benjamin.

So they hid away their letters and went back to their work.

The chief was standing just outside the door; he was in shore-going rig and several strips of newspaper plastered on his chin bore evidence that he had lately shaved.

Benjamin was just nudging Sivert to show him the blood-stains, when the chief called impatiently into the firemen's quarters: "Aren't you coming, Little Bekhardt?"

No reply.

Then the chief went in himself.

Sivert and Benjamin stayed where they were, wondering what the chief wanted forward; what was he doing with Little Bekhardt?

The chief came out again, holding the coal-trimmer tightly by the arm; he almost had to drag him along. Little Bekhardt's face was dazed with a fear and desperation such as Benjamin had never seen before. He was struggling violently.

"I won't," he stuttered; "I won't go to hospital! Oh, I can work a long time yet, I don't want any wages, only don't take me away. Help me, Benjamin! help me for Christ's sake! I won't leave the *Mignon,*

I won't be left to die while you others go away to sea and get home. Help me, Benjamin — won't you? Oh, you dirty scab! Then, may you rot away like me into a stinking beast."

"Hold your noise," said the chief severely, pushing him out on deck.

Little Bekhardt turned with a last wild groan. "You'll be along soon!" he grimaced.

After that he went willingly.

Sivert and Benjamin stood watching the frail figure seesawing along the deck.

All cheerfulness was gone. And a gnawing fear, a horrible suspicion sprang up again in Benjamin's heart.

XXII

HE days went by one after another. The *Mignon* lay by the quay-side for a week, a fortnight, waiting her turn to load. The crew passed the time in a delirious orgy, deaf and blind to the world, according to the eternal law of sailors in port. Outside, the sea was waiting for them with its blank nothingness; but here was life — a piano banging away in a tavern, a glass of whisky gleaming in the lamplight, a row of laughing girls dancing arm in arm out of the darkness.

Work and riot, that was all that happened, filling the men's lives with a noisy emptiness. Then there was a little cursing at the skipper and a little wondering about Benjamin.

"What's come over him?" asks Manna; "why doesn't he come with us any more? What makes him so pale and queer? He scarcely has a word for Sivert. . . ." But nobody has time to answer him, the port is calling them, they have to go ashore and raise hell.

But one day something did happen: Leif was missing; his bunk lay empty a whole day and night before a new man crawled up and took possession of it.

It was one night like all the rest that the deck hands from the *Mignon* came across some fellow-countrymen in a bar. They were the crew of a Trondhjem boat that had come in that morning. There was wild excitement, they drank together and got red-hot with whisky and patriotism. They had sailed with the same messmates, called at the same ports, their lives were inseparably interwoven. The result was that the *Mignon*'s men went aboard the others' ship for a last drink.

They started a trial of strength, hands against hands, and the *Mignon*'s crowd won all along the line, except Oscar, who had such an awful pain in his wrist. But they were generous in their victory and loud in their praises of the others' muscles, they had never come across any fellows to beat them and they drank everlasting friendship.

Leif was standing away from the rest; his eyes were bright, his face was flushed, he was still trembling with delight. The incredible had happened, he had won, he had done his share in upholding the honour of the *Mignon;* it was a big thing, he thought.

And he entirely forgot that God had a down on him, all he remembered was that he had got his letter and had won his match. His heart swelled with desire for fresh exploits, the afflicted of God strained his sinews taut in the hope of performing some rare deed.

Then a ferry-boat came across the harbour, full

of lights and music and noise, with a gay crowd returning from a pleasure trip. All the men ran to the rail and gave the ferry a cheer. The boat looked so fine as she glided over the dark water with all her gleaming lights. She came just under their ship, sweeping past, and the people on board waved to them. Then it happened.

A white bundle dropped overboard with a splash and a scream; it was a little child that had fallen into the water.

With a cold shiver Leif felt that his hour had come, he leapt on to the bulwark and jumped overboard. He came down feet first and went under like a stone. At the same instant Manna plunged after him. The ferry stopped and went astern, a terrible panic broke out on board, shrieking and sobbing all along the side. After a little while, an infinitely long while, Leif and Manna reappeared, but neither brought the child with him. Every eye scanned the sea, but no white bundle came up. On board the ferry they had to hold the mother back by force; she wanted to jump in after her child.

Manna dived again and again, he stayed a long time under water, but he always came up empty-handed. Every time a groan of disappointment was heard. He was given all sorts of conflicting advice where to search, and he dived again. Leif swam about ceaselessly with rapid, ineffectual strokes, his legs working away like a clumsy pair of scissors. An

eternity had gone by; at last there was a man who called out something about the current. Ah, the current! they nodded their heads, and the ferry went slowly ahead, silent as Charon's boat.

Leif and Manna struggled in to a little ladder on the quay-side and clambered up, dripping wet.

"That was a sad business, a very sad business," said Manna, squeezing out his jacket.

But Leif answered: "I don't go clear."

"What do you mean?" asked Manna, looking at him in the light of the arc-lamp over their heads. Leif was white as chalk, his eyes were stiff with horror and he was shaking all over.

"What is it?" asked Manna again. "And what do you mean?"

"Didn't you see it? Don't you understand?" stammered Leif, and his head sank on his chest. "Just as I jumped the child came up. I felt something hard against my heel. No, I don't go clear."

Suddenly he broke into a shriek, of sorrow and impotence and humiliation. And before Manna guessed what he was doing Leif had started to run off along the quays, reeling like a drunken man and dripping with water.

Manna let him run. He knew enough of the world to see that a young heart is best left to itself when life has hit it too hard. Leif would naturally run himself tired, think himself tired, drink himself tired — and then he would come back aboard the *Mignon*.

Manna stood and watched him till he swung round a corner and disappeared. "Soon, very soon he'll be back," he thought as he walked slowly to meet the others.

But neither Manna nor any one else from the *Mignon* has seen Leif since that day.

XXIII

THE evening sun fell slanting across the deck and the men had long ago knocked off, but Benjamin was the only one who had yet gone ashore. To-day as other days he went over the gangway alone. Where he was going none of them knew, perhaps he did not know himself.

The rest of the deck hands sat in the forecastle looking at Santos; the dog was ill.

He wouldn't touch food and just lay whining and licking his back again and again. His hair was coming out and little running boils appeared on the bare skin.

"What's the matter with you, little Santos?" they asked, full of concern. They quite forgot to go ashore and sat round staring at the poor little creature.

"You mustn't go sick on us, Santos, that'll never do!"

Santos only stared at them with his gentle brown eyes.

"You ought to have kept on board," said Christiansund, "instead of routing about those dirty slums, then you wouldn't have got bad."

"Ah, but it'd have been pretty slow for Santos staying aboard all the evening," replied Manna, taking the dog's part.

"We can't go on like this," said Risör at last. "I'm going to take Santos ashore and see if I can get something to rub him with."

"Right you are, Risör," said the others.

So Risör got into his shore rig and went off with the dog on his arm.

Little did the *Mignon* gang suspect the glorious adventure that awaited him.

Risör had to search a long time before he found a druggist's far up town. He went in and held out Santos over the counter. "*Malo,*" he said and produced some broken English.

The druggist gave a glance at the dog and explained that it ought to go to a vet — "Try Brown in King Street."

Risör stared at him helplessly without taking in a word. He pointed once more to Santos and said "Salve?"

Then it was that a young lady came to his assistance. She had been standing at the counter watching the innocent sailor boy and his dog.

She had a look at the boils and shook her head. Then she seemed to hit on a plan. "The dog can come home with me," she said to the druggist. "Our coachman has such a way with animals."

Risör made out at last that the lady wanted him

and Santos to go with her and he followed her obediently into the street. She tried to say something civil to him as they hurried along, and he nodded with delight and didn't understand a word. The conversation came to a stop.

"How pretty she is!" thought Risör, stealing a sidelong glance at her.

Her mouth was so shapely and red, her eyes so gentle and grey, and her skin shone white under her rich auburn hair. Long pendants of green jade in her ears gave her face an air of unapproachable calm.

It happened once or twice that people turned round to look at the strange pair, but Risör did not notice it. That was what it was like to walk with her.

At last they came to a big white detached house; they were there. A parlour-maid opened the door and the lady said something to her and passed on through a big hall.

Risör stood gazing after the tall, elegant figure till at last the maid succeeded in drawing him into the kitchen. As in a dream he found that Santos was taken from him; the coachman was to try his hand at doctoring the dog in the stables.

The maid brought in tea and cakes, but Risör sat on the edge of his chair, so shy that he could scarcely touch the food. "But what's become of her?" he was thinking all the time. Now and again he glanced awkwardly about the kitchen; oh, it was fine, a regular palace you might call it.

Half an hour went by and the coachman brought Santos back, wrapped in an old horse-cloth. Risör thanked him as well as he could; it seemed to be time to go.

So after all he was not to see her again. With a queer abject feeling he shuffled across the kitchen and made for the door.

At that moment she appeared. She had changed her dress, a low-necked black silk gown clung to her slender figure and Risör was struck dumb with her magnificence as she held out her hand.

"Good-bye!" she said with a smile.

And Risör found himself back in the street. It had grown pitch-dark, but many white and coloured lights floated past him as he made his way down to the harbour.

Santos lay asleep under the horse-cloth; "Yes, Santos, you sleep away," he said quietly.

He was still full of the marvellous twilight of her grey eyes, and the pressure of her hand still quivered in his coarse working fist.

"Did you see how pretty she was, Santos?" he asked, lifting a corner of the cloth. "So pretty, so pretty, wasn't she?"

When Risör came into the *Mignon*'s forecastle he was quite staggered by the yells that greeted him.

"We saw you, we saw you!" shouted his shipmates; "where did you manage to pick up that fine lady?"

Only then did Risör understand what honour had fallen to his lot; he smiled and felt flattered as he laid Santos in his bunk.

"Well, it's a long story," he replied.

But Manna would have it out of him at once.

"Did you get anything?" he roared.

Risör blinked his eyes at him — what did Manna mean by that?

Then it slowly dawned on him what his shipmates had in their heads, and Risör couldn't resist it, a mighty feeling of pride took hold of him and he heard himself say, "Not half!"

Questions rained down on him and after a while the story took shape.

"'Come home with me,' she said. I was on. You bet she had a fine place, her husband's mayor of the town; oh, there were plenty of rocking-chairs and knitted table-covers and fine pictures on the walls. She brought out glasses and we sat down to drink wine. Then I got an arm round her waist, we were sitting on the sofa, you see— and you all know how it goes," said Risör, looking modestly down.

"Ah, you Risör, you Risör!" exclaimed Manna, looking at him with admiration.

"Yes, you're the boss," said Christiansund, tremendously proud of him.

"And he picks the mayor's own missis, baa — aa," bleated Oscar.

"Ah, that Risör knows a thing or two," they muttered one and all as they turned in.

Risör had taken Santos up into his bunk, but however it was, he couldn't get to sleep that night. He lay awake a long time staring vacantly before him.

Suddenly he hugged Santos in his arms and pressed his freckled face against the dog's mangy skin.

XXIV

IN the forenoon of the next day Benjamin sneaked ashore. It was in the middle of working hours, but they were all busy aft and the *Mignon*'s decks were deserted. Nobody saw him go forward and change, nobody stopped him as he went down the gangway.

The town was sweltering in the heat as he hurried along, with a glare of white surfaces on every side. The sun seemed to have left the sky and to be pressing down upon the asphalt.

Benjamin went up to a pillar of chalk that was brooding white and calm in the midst of the lava.

"Can you tell me the way to the hospital?" he asked. The policeman pointed.

Soon the hospital building rose before him, a huge white stone block, splashed with green Venetian blinds.

He found the entrance and suddenly the cool darkness of a big concrete room closed about him. A man was sitting behind a counter reading a paper.

"What can I do for you?"

"Can I go and see the Norwegian fireman who was brought here on Tuesday?" asked Benjamin.

"It is visiting time, but I'm not quite sure. One moment." He seized the house telephone, spoke a word or two, and then nodded kindly. "Yes, it's all right. You can go up; second floor, sixth door on the left."

Benjamin climbed the stairs and found Little Bekhardt's ward — an immense, bright room, infinitely white. Two rows of beds ran along the walls, almost meeting at the other end. Everything was white, the only contrasts were the dark shocks of hair and yellow faces on the pillows and the red crosses on the nurses' arms. Everything else was wiped out; it was a white and silent stream flowing away from life with unearthly torpor.

A tall, severe-looking sister came up to Benjamin and took him to the bed. The faces around stared languidly at this strong, live person in day clothes who walked quickly past them.

An old man waved him off with his hand. Why did this dark colossus come striking at his weary pupils? it gave him such an odd pain.

Little Bekhardt was asleep when they came up. A thick gauze bandage was wrapped round his head over one eye. The other looked so lonely and forlorn, screwed up in sleep. It was as though Little Bekhardt had already gone blind.

"I'll wake him," said the nurse. "He's got to wake up anyhow; it's nearly dinner-time."

She pinched the sleeper's arm, they heard a tired

groan, then Little Bekhardt opened his eye. At once an ecstatic joy beamed in his thin features and he sat up with a jerk.

"O Benjamin, fancy you coming," he whispered; "so God hasn't forgotten me after all."

"Only a moment," said the nurse and left them.

"Can you forgive me for cursing you so horribly?" said Little Bekhardt. "I wasn't myself, you see, it knocked me out having to leave the *Mignon*. So good of you to come and see me!"

"It isn't good," said Benjamin, and he knew he was speaking the truth.

"Yes, it is, awfully good, that's sure. How are things on board, have they got another coal-trimmer instead of me?"

"No," lied Benjamin to please him.

"You don't say so!" Little Bekhardt was radiant.

"And do you know what, Benjamin, it's not altogether impossible that I'll get well. I shall lose one eye of course, but nothing is hopeless, the doctor says. Nothing is hopeless; oh, Little Bekhardt may be on his feet again yet. — It's not so bad in here, you know. The grub's not up to much, it isn't like the *Mignon*. I shan't be sorry to get out, in a month or so, two perhaps. Oh, the time'll soon pass."

"Did the doctor say a month or two?" asked Benjamin.

"No, not exactly in so many words, you know,

they're so awfully cautious, these fellows. Nothing is hopeless, that's what he said."

Poor Little Bekhardt, a hope was growing in his soul; a pair of eye-glasses dropped a couple of careless words and suddenly everything was possible.

He went on talking about his plans after he had been discharged; oh, there was no telling how grand it would be.

But Benjamin was no longer listening to him; he was gazing as though hypnotized into the vast dead ward. Bed after bed they lay, these men whom life had smitten with its horror. They had come from every corner of the earth, an infinity of human destinies which had but one point of resemblance — degradation, putrefaction. Their faces drowsed on the white pillows, their hands lay motionless on the bed-clothes. All was still; Little Bekhardt's whispers and the hum of the fans were the only sound that broke the silence. It was like an immense morgue, where the corpses were able to eat and drink and sleep. But this would one day be Benjamin's place; even now perhaps a hideous poison was vitiating his blood and soon he would be ripe to be brought here.

"At home in Brevik — " he heard Little Bekhardt's voice in a white mist — "Have you ever been there?"

"No," replied Benjamin.

"It's fine in summer-time, I can tell you. The small boys lie out on the pier fishing for groundling;

oh, it's fine sport all day long. I was a good one at fishing there myself once; it'll be grand to get back."

At that moment the sister appeared at the foot of the bed.

"Time's up," she said.

Benjamin got up from the chair.

"Don't go," whispered Little Bekhardt, and his face clouded over. "You'll make it all so hopeless again."

"Don't lose heart," said Benjamin, trying to smile. The sister fidgeted impatiently. But Benjamin bent over the coal-trimmer and whispered: "What was the name of that specialist?"

Little Bekhardt blinked at him in surprise.

"Robertson — what do you want with him? He lives in that big brick house on the quay just opposite the *Mignon*; you know, where there's an electric sign at night. What do you want there?"

Suddenly a happy smile broke out on Little Bekhardt's face and he held out his poor wasted hand.

"No, he's been paid, Benjamin, you needn't think of that. But thanks for wanting to help me, it's awfully kind of you, you're frightfully good to Little Bekhardt ——"

"Don't say that," stammered Benjamin; "I wasn't thinking a moment ——"

"Oh yes, you were," the other smiled. "It's no use denying it. But ever so many thanks all the same. Well, good-bye, Benjamin, give my love to all on board and think of me now and then."

The frail hand clasped Benjamin's as though Little Bekhardt wanted to take leave of the whole crew in his person.

"Now you must come away," said the sister angrily. "You ought to have gone long ago: I said only a moment. I don't know what you're thinking of."

Benjamin followed her. Once he turned and saw that Little Bekhardt was crying.

Benjamin was out in the street again, bewildered by sunshine, dust, and noise. The sick man's words had filled him with desperate sorrow and shame. So it was possible for another to think so well of him. If he had only known why Benjamin asked the question!

A little public garden made a flowery oasis in the glaring desert, round a fountain which still took the trouble to play in the noonday heat. Benjamin sank on to a bench under the shaggy, stunted palms. He was dead-beat and could go no farther.

Day after day the sickening fear had dwelt within him, keeping his eyes fixed upon the dark horror; but now there should be an end of it.

Yesterday evening he stood on the quay in the darkness; he only had to take the plunge, and there would be no more abomination, no more terror. He stood there by the hour, but God! — he dared not jump out into the dead, oily water below.

Now he'd make an end of it all.

He got up with a start, as a scornful laugh twitted him inwardly: MacGregor, he sneered at himself;

you're like the man who played at death. You daren't let the water rush in through mouth, nose, ears, you daren't go to the bottom, down to the dead rats.

"Yes, you *shall* die!" he almost shouted, stamping his foot on the ground.

Three girls came across the open space among the palms, carrying tennis rackets. They swayed their hips with an air of assurance and laughed aloud, showing their big teeth.

A wild fury blazed up in Benjamin and he began to steal after them like a madman.

"And you shall die too," he hissed between his clenched teeth. "O God, how you shall die. That arm swinging the racket backwards and forwards, that arm shall stink, I can smell it now. Don't laugh, damn you, your laughter shall rot on your lips. Hush, keep still, go quietly off to the churchyard and crawl into an open grave, then it'll be done.

"No, they shan't die," he whispered the next moment, stopping as though petrified. "They shall live for many happy years. I'm the only one who's to die, the only one in the world. All the others will live on, people will stroll along the street at home; 'What's happened to Hall?' one of them will ask. 'I don't know,' the other will answer; 'let's go into the Grand and have a Pilsener, I've got such a deuce of a thirst.'"

The *Mignon* would sail the next day, the watches would relieve one another as before, and soon he

would be forgotten as Anton was forgotten. Nobody remembered Anton now, nobody except Benjamin. And suddenly he felt a boundless affection for the dead fireman. "O Anton, Anton," he said, opening his heart to him.

But the ship sails on; Benjamin's absence would make no difference. O God, how he hated all those who would be left! A vague thought of sinking the *Mignon* flickered through him.

"No, I won't die," he muttered with slobbering lips. "What does it matter if I am ill? But I won't die, anything but that."

He went slowly along, but suddenly stopped as if he had been shot. A brass plate on a door threatened him with its hard, black letters — "Dr. J. Ferrier Robertson. 10–1, 4–6."

"Oh no, no," he whispered; "it's not true, I'm not ill. He'll tell me I'm not. It's still his consulting time, I'll go up now and get him to tell me that. There's absolutely nothing the matter with you, he'll say, and he'll put his glasses straight and look annoyed."

But Benjamin dared not go up, he was mortally afraid. He walked several times up and down, always stopping in front of the brass plate. But then he walked on.

"You daren't after all," he said at last. "Then you'd better go aboard and get bawled at for being ashore without leave."

He began to cross the quay slowly.

Two ladies in black came towards him, one of them quite young, the other middle-aged.

A sudden tenderness arose within him; they were in mourning, they had lost one of their dear ones. They were suffering, unhappy like himself. They were so quiet and sorrowful, two dark figures in all this scorching sunshine.

He imagined something wonderfully beautiful in the relationship between these two: they were mother and daughter, but at the same time they were friends —— But they must not be sad, for he loved them.

As Benjamin stepped on to the *Mignon*'s deck he met the boatswain.

"What the blazing hell are you up to, man?" he yelled. "Going ashore in the middle of working hours, you'll get booted on the spot. You must be stark staring mad, I should think! Get away for'ard and change your clothes, only be careful they don't see you from the bridge. I won't say anything this time."

"Thanks," said Benjamin with a pale smile. And he walked slowly and unconcernedly along the deck.

"What the devil's come over the boy?" muttered the boatswain, staring at him thoughtfully.

XXV

NEXT day the mate came up to the hands as they knocked off work. "You've got to stay aboard!" he sniffed. "Nobody's allowed to go ashore; we sail at ten." Then he himself left the ship.

"It'll be a good thing to get to sea," said Manna.

"You're right," agreed Christiansund.

"Yes, it's a queer thing, I'll be glad too," muttered Risör, and only he himself knew how fervently he meant it. All the previous day he was the only one who stayed on board; he would not venture outside the forecastle, distracted with terror of meeting *her* again, the young lady with the kind grey eyes.

Benjamin went forward and put on his blue clothes.

"What are you doing?" asked Sivert. "Are you going ashore?" Benjamin nodded.

"But what in the Lord's name is the matter with you? You'll get the boot the way you're going on — yesterday the same. My word, Benjamin, you'll have to pull yourself together!"

Benjamin made no answer.

"That's right," said Manna; "you let those blighters amidships go to blazes, Benjamin. Are you going after a woman?"

At that Benjamin smiled a smile that made Sivert scream. "What is it, Benjamin? What's happened to you? You're so changed, your face is so pale and queer. Are you ill?"

Benjamin made no answer.

To-day again nobody stopped him, not a soul saw him land on the quay. "They must think I'm mad on board," he reflected, "and perhaps that's just as well." He walked up to the big grey house, where the black iron flourishes of the electric sign stood out in naked ugliness against the evening sky.

A paralysing wave of fear kept coming and going across his chest, his wrists were powerless and numb. But he set his teeth; now there must be an end of it.

"Dr. J. Ferrier Robertson. 10–1, 4–6"; he entered the door. The hall had been lately washed and smelt of moisture and soft soap, the stairs were soaked and musty with water. He dashed up them defiantly, and his heart was beating madly as he caught sight of the same brass plate on the first floor. He pulled the door open and went in. There was nobody in the waiting-room and he breathed more freely; so he would get in at once. The air was heavy with a sweet, elusive hint of iodine and naphtha which filled him with vague terrors.

The door of the consulting-room opened.—

"Next!" twanged a voice inside. A puffy red face appeared in the doorway and a pair of big, searching eyes were bent upon the patient over the spectacles. Two or three thin strips of hair were plastered down over the forehead. "Every cobbler has hair like that," thought Benjamin with the ghost of a smile. Was he smiling for the last time?

The door closed behind him. . . .

Benjamin was back on the stairs, which were still reeking from the charwoman's work.

His face was white as chalk, with great beads of perspiration breaking out on his forehead, his mouth hung open, his eyes were empty and lifeless. He put out his foot and felt for the next step; in that way he went downstairs.

After all.

He hadn't believed it, he had hoped all the time it would be all right. Now everything was finished. The doctor said nothing but the one terrible word, Little Bekhardt's word, but that was enough to kill him. Now there was nothing more, all gone, all gone, the end of the world! He rocked his head like an old man.

He was in a state of collapse, his knees shook under him, his whole frame was relaxed. Now and again an imbecile smile came over his lips. The tension of the last week had been too much for him, the flame had flickered out and all was ashes.

He came out into the street and staggered slowly

up to the little park where he had sat the day before. The seat was still there; nothing had happened. People went past, automobiles, street-cars. Finished, finished. The sun was still shining over the Lion's Head, its rays were golden and soothing. Benjamin closed his eyes, and the lids became pink rose-leaves, penetrated by a soft and gentle light. And at that moment a verse he had once read occurred to his memory; it ran:

> Kiss me, sun, upon the eyes,
> Undeserving though I be.
> Tears behind the lids will rise,
> Kiss me, sun, and set them free.
> Kisses pitying and soft
> Gently brush away the pain.
> Kiss my eyelids, sun, again,
> Though I have transgressed so oft.

And as he sat there in the sunshine the tears slowly trickled down his cheeks. He was so helplessly young and unhappy, so faint and shattered by life's cruel blow. He was only nineteen, a little clod of soft springtime mould after all.

A long, long time he sat on the bench. Well, then, it had to be. Quiet as a lamb he would go to the slaughter. For Father's and Mother's and Eva's sake he would die, ah well!

"What was it the doctor said? 'Don't take it so

much to heart, it will all come right' — don't you believe it, Benjamin, don't you believe it. You have been false to Eva once, don't be so again. You'll be false to her if you go on living. She is lying in her white room, sick and tired, but nothing in the world is so white as that room. And that is why you must die, you see; that is why.

"Can you feel that I am thinking of you now, Eva, that my soul is kissing you good-bye? I am going to die, dearest. But if there is a life after death I shall go on loving you, I shall love your sorrow into happiness, love your tears into smiles. You shall be surrounded by the scent of roses, by a dream of violins, you shall walk in a radiance of golden light. That is what your life shall be, because I love you.

"I ask nothing in return, only that you may sometimes smile and try to remember me — perhaps he was a dear boy ——

"You shall never know any more, your life shall be a flowery paradise, where sin and sorrow never enter in."

A mood of transcendental brightness swelled up in Benjamin's tormented heart. He it was who bore all the guilt of the world.

But there was no mystery, he was no son of God, only a young lad sitting on a bench down in Cape Town, a poor little creature who was going to die.

The sun had sunk into the sea, darkness fell upon the earth, but still Benjamin sat there.

All at once he gave a start — the *Mignon*. He looked at his watch. It was half past nine, he must get aboard. He got up and walked down towards the harbour. Why? Just as well there as anywhere else. And he wanted to look upon the sea and the stars before he died.

XXVI

THE whole crowd forward were sitting in the firemen's quarters playing cards. They started with poker, but found that too slow. They wanted sudden death, a short and sharp dispatch of money and excitement. So they had dropped it for "half past eleven."

There was a zinc bucket full of strong beer standing on the deck and they dipped their mugs into it all the time. But one by one the men were knocked out, money was scarce the last day in port. Finally only four players were left in — Manna, Oscar, Fatty Mens, and the Englishman who had taken Narvik's place. The game was getting pretty hot, there was already eleven pounds in notes and silver lying on the table. Oscar dealt, and the men snatched at their cards like lightning and held them up close to their faces lest anybody should get a glimpse at them.

The Englishman put on two pounds. Oscar declared "half past eleven." Four more pounds in the bank, and the Englishman was cleaned out. Presently Manna went three pounds. Now there were eighteen

pounds in the bank. The pack was getting thin, there were only two more rounds, then Oscar could scoop the lot.

There was breathless excitement in the forecastle. They all hung over the table to follow the play. Most of them were fabulously expert at this game, they could almost tell how the cards lay in the pack, for it was strange how little difference shuffling made.

Fatty Mens had lost four pounds; now he had only one left. There were twenty-six in the bank.

Oscar dealt, it was the last round. Manna won six pounds, then it was Mens's turn.

"Oh, let's have the trash!" he said carelessly. "I'm going for the bank."

A cold sweat broke out on Oscar's forehead, his brown eyes turned upon Mens, bursting with interrogation, and he protested: "No — that's not right. You've only got one pound, you can't pay if you lose. I shan't give you cards."

"Oh, hold your jaw!" howled all the firemen and deck hands together. Right or not, they were past caring; all they wanted was to see Fatty Mens win or lose all.

Oscar dared not refuse any longer. He cautiously drew a card from the pack and turned it up. It was a nine.

For some moments nothing was heard but the men's deep breathing; they were all staring at the nine of clubs.

Would he stop there or go on?

Oscar seemed on the rack, he fingered his hand nervously, looking by turns at the nine and at Mens.

Then he made up his mind and laid one more card on the table. All eyes were turned from the card to Mens and a tense sigh came as from one man.

It was a two. Oscar had won, he had eleven.

Then Mens cried out: "He cheated, I saw him!" And he grabbed at Oscar, who tore himself free and dashed out of the door, bellowing with fear.

Mens jumped across the table after him. The others rushed out. Oscar and Mens had reached the deck, but the others were caught in a furious scrimmage in the narrow alleyway and couldn't get out. They shoved and kicked and hit, and all at once a fierce fight started in the darkness, firemen against seamen.

They heard a loud, shrill bleat outside; Mens had got hold of Oscar. Then Manna forced his way forward, his powerful frame thrust the others aside and his terrible fists worked like a steam-hammer; one fireman dropped in a heap, another dashed out on deck screaming with terror. The way was clear. Manna sprang over the weather-board and an avalanche of men followed him, fighting and howling.

Mens was just shaking up Oscar, who had collapsed in a heap and was afraid to hit — when Manna was there. He dropped his prey and turned to his new antagonist. But at that moment the whole

scramble of the fight whirled over them like a cyclone.

The men hit out like maniacs, possessed by hatred and revenge; the day of reckoning had arrived.

The firemen remembered Anton, their dead messmate, and they hadn't forgotten that it was Aalesund, one of the devils opposite, who had brought his sister aboard. Now vengeance was coming.

Every angry word, every insult came up and set their blood boiling, and their fists swung around madly till they came up against the welcome soft flesh of another man.

They wrestled and butted and bit with every low-down water-side trick, and at last they burst out on deck in a confused mass of arms and legs and went on with the fight there.

Fatty Mens and Manna were struggling like madmen to get free, they had only one desire — to get at each other; but a reptile flung its thousand arms about them and kept them back. Oscar lay at the bottom of all yelling wildly. He caught sight of a naked foot and dug his teeth into it. But the foot jerked itself free and kicked back, making the blood spurt from Oscar's nose.

They kicked, they clawed, they tore off each other's clothes till they were half naked; they went at each other like wild beasts, and all the time they were groaning for mercy, howling with pain, and growling for blood.

But there was one man watching the fight from the bridge house with a queer smile on his face. It was the steward. He was drunk and had only one thought in the world — a dish of porridge Fatty Mens had once thrown at his head.

Shame and hatred had been stewing in him all the long days and nights at sea till his whole life had become an unavenged insult. Now at last his hour had come.

He darted into the galley, seized a spit, and thrust it into the fire. He held it there till it was red hot; then he ran forward to the men. Manna and Mens had fought their way through, they stood glaring at each other for a savage second before the storm broke. It was the kings of the firemen and deck hands who were face to face, each longing to kill the other for the honour of his side.

Then the steward came rushing up; he jumped behind Mens holding the red-hot spit aloft, then let it fall hissing over his enemy's head. But Manna darted forward, his hand flew up and grasped the spit.

A sharp and terrible roar went up; the iron had burnt through the flesh, right through the bone and out again. The spit fell with a crash. The blood started in a dark-red stream from Manna's right hand. He staggered forward with his left arm raised against the steward.

But he was done; he dropped on the deck, gave a jerk or two, and then lay still.

But Mens was upon the steward in a flash; he seized him and lifted him off his feet; they heard a roar of fear, as Mens carried him to the bulwarks and threw him into the sea.

At that moment the police car drove up and the constables rushed on board. But the captain stopped them amidships; they listened to him and saluted.

When they came on to the forward deck all was quiet. A group of men stood round a dark, lifeless form, watching the blood pouring out of the charred hand. The policemen carried him out to the car and it tore off to the ambulance station.

All thoughts of hatred and revenge were blown away, they had lost all idea of their fury. They were just a few ragged, bruised, and blood-stained men standing along the ship's side staring after a car which was dashing away.

Mens lay up on the forecastle-head crying.

XXVII

ONCE more a young face paused on the quay in the darkness. Behind him the town sparkled with its myriad lights, before him lay the dark mass of the ship, dead and inert. But to-night there was no choice.

When Benjamin came aboard all was noise and confusion. The crew were hauling on hawsers and wires, the winches clattered away, and far below the engines were throbbing for the first time for many days.

"Where the devil have you been?" yelled the second mate. "Take in the gangway, men! Hurry up for'ard and change, and then get on to the fo'c'sle head quicker than lightning."

Benjamin went forward.

The chief mate stood on the forecastle head and stared at him. — "Don't excite yourself!" he sniffed contemptuously; "you're not the least bit necessary, my lad! We've got two new men on board, sent home by the Consul. They're as keen to work as they are to die. One of them is to have Manna's place and the other was just standing here praying to God

you'd be late, so he could get your job. We're sailing before our time, we shouldn't have waited a second for you, you disobedient dog. What have you been doing ashore? Women, eh? Get in now, we don't want you, there are plenty of hands on the fo'c'sle head. I wish you'd never come back, and the skipper said the same. There's one too many aboard the *Mignon*; it would have been a cursed good job if you'd stayed on the quay and waved us good-bye."

"Mister Mate!" the skipper roared from the bridge through the megaphone. "Set that man to work!"

"Ay ay, sir!" the mate shouted back, and he went on just as loudly: "Will you get away and change? How many more times have I got to tell you? I've never seen the like of you for obstinacy. If you're not back in two minutes you shall die and be damned."

The words jingled feebly against Benjamin's consciousness, then they dropped off and were gone.

He went up the ladder and pushed the mate aside. "Let me get up," he said.

"Aren't you going to change?" asked the mate agape. "Spoil your shore clothes, eh?"

Benjamin's only answer was to catch hold of a hawser and start hauling behind Sivert.

Little by little the quay slipped back into the darkness; the light of a lamp fell in a quivering streak on the smooth black water.

The ship backed out, the propeller lashed the

water into foam, then the *Mignon* swung round and steamed ahead towards the open sea.

Cape Town was left behind, twinkling with its thousand lights up towards Table Mountain.

The men coiled the hawsers and went to their quarters. There were two new faces on the seamen's side: one man in Manna's place and one who had none. Both came from hospital.

The hands sat down at the table and began at once to discuss the fight.

"Manna will never be fit for anything again, if he gets over it," said Oscar.

"He's a cripple for sure," muttered Christiansund.

"It's a bloody shame," said Risör. And he added slowly: "There's not so many of us left who sailed from Norway. Aalesund's gone, Narvik, Leif, and Manna on our side. And Anton and Little Bekhardt on the other side."

There was dead silence in the forecastle. Oh, they were getting thinned out now, the *Mignon*'s crowd, the scythe swished through their ranks with an icy whine, one after another fell, and who would be the next?

"Don't forget the steward!" said Christiansund at last, showing his gums in a grin, and the others couldn't help smiling. "He durstn't come aboard again; you should have seen him run along the quay like a wet dog."

As in a mist Benjamin heard what they were talking about, and bit by bit he found out what had happened.

One of the new hands, a Trondhjem lad, was trying to relate an adventure he had had with a ward maid at the hospital, but the others wouldn't give him a chance.

They only wanted to talk about the fight, the card game, the whole extraordinary afternoon that Benjamin knew nothing about.

The forecastle was no longer the same, it did not belong to him any more.

With a strange sense of blankness he went out on deck. Santos ran after him. Sivert was on the lookout and hurried aft as soon as he saw his chum. He stared at the white face before him, and suddenly he could find nothing to say.

"Poor Santos," he said at last; "those boils don't get any better. I believe the kindest thing would be to put an end to him."

Benjamin did not seem to hear what Sivert was saying, he simply stood gazing fixedly before him. Then he grasped his friend's hand impulsively.

"O Sivert, Sivert!" he groaned. He said no more, but turned quickly and walked aft.

Again there was only one thing in his head — he was to die. An obscure force guided his steps and presently he found himself on the poop.

It was an indescribably lovely night, the stars

sparkled overhead, the lights ashore gleamed with a far-off melancholy, a gentle breeze swept over the ship as she held on through the darkness.

In a brief moment he would be gone, but everything would be as before — the breeze, the ship, and the stars. A man forward would be made happy; he would get off paying his passage and would be paid instead. His death would do some good after all.

His nineteen years with their joys and hopes and sufferings trembled for an instant in the night; why had they been charged with meaning, was it all intended as a small indemnity for what was to come?

What do we know of intention and object? Life is a boundless riddle, and we are the blind and the dumb.

Santos jumped up at him and licked his hand. He lifted the dog on his arm and patted him gently.

"Santos," he said, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Then he slowly climbed over the rail with the dog in his arms. For a moment he held fast by his free hand.

The ship's wake rose towards him in a sweeping ridge, then sank into a surging whirl of phosphorescence. A cold air came up from the foaming backwash, and without knowing it Benjamin clutched the rail convulsively. He stared down into the phosphorescence and seemed to see greedy yellow teeth gleaming in the ocean's terrible black mouth; like the wait-

ing teeth of a shark the sea-fire grinned that night. Yes, the deep awaited him, darkness and annihilation, and he trembled.

And a sudden resentment surged up within him and chased away the rapture of the starry night. His only thought was that the ship was already sailing on without him, even before he had disappeared.

The officers wanted to be rid of him; they would thank God if they could find a place for a new man to-morrow morning. And his shipmates forward had other things to think of: to-night they were talking of the fight in which he had had no part, and to-morrow they would be amidships washing paint, nine hands, the full muster, but Benjamin would not be among them. And at dinner-time the new man would have a chance for his adventure with the ward maid. But Benjamin would be forgotten. His story was written in chalk on the ship's side, and the sea washed it away; life put a fresh mark in its place.

One after another the ship had broken his shipmates and flung them away; she was only waiting for a new victim, why not him? It was Benjamin this time, now it was his turn to be seized in her monstrous iron grip and flung into the void. And then the ship would close her dark, impenetrable features and turn her head once more to the solitudes as though nothing had happened. But she was rejoicing too soon, he could still hold on and refuse to let the ship have her will.

It would not take much, the relaxing of a muscle, and then he would be in the power of the sea and the sharks. And the ship would push on, swinging her hull towards the northern constellations, and would not own him. In her haughty, unfeeling calm she would cleave the thousand miles of her course, but she would know nothing of Anton, nothing of Manna, of Leif, of Little Bekhardt, and she would know nothing of him who was to be swallowed by the horrors of the deep.

Benjamin turned his head and stared at the ship, and he thought she stared back at him. Was he mistaken — did he not see a grimace, full of scorn and hate, pass over the iron plates?

And slowly the answer appeared in the boy's face, his mouth was drawn into a bitter, evil grin. He clenched his fists and his eyes were coldly defiant; the ship seemed to have lent him her hatred, a strip of iron rose from the deck and personified her.

Yes, he hated the ship. He wished her no joy. And he revenged himself by clinging fast to her, by holding on to her sides when she was trying to shake him off. The ship should not sail on without him.

Benjamin dropped Santos on deck and climbed back over the rail.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The type in which this book has been set (on the Linotype) is based on the design of Caslon. It is generally conceded that William Caslon (1692–1766) brought the old-style letter to its highest perfection and while certain modifications have been introduced to meet changing printing conditions, the basic design of the Caslon letters has never been improved. The type selected for this book is a modern adaptation rather than an exact copy of the original. Caslon's letters are noted for their extreme legibility.

SET UP, ELECTROTYPED, PRINTED AND BOUND BY THE PLIMPTON PRESS, NORWOOD, MASS. · ESPARTO PAPER MANUFACTURED IN SCOTLAND AND FURNISHED BY W. F. ETHERINGTON & CO. NEW YORK

THE GATEWAY TO LIFE. By Frank Thiess. *Translated from the German by H. T. Lowe-Porter.*

This author, regarded by exacting European judges as one of the most significant of the younger contemporaries of Thomas Mann, is now introduced to American readers by one volume of a tetralogy which will depict the spiritual coming-of-age of the post-war generation in Germany. The English version is made by the translator of Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*).

KINGLY DAYS. By Bruno Frank. *Translated from the German by H. T. Lowe-Porter.*

Five quasi-historical episodes in the life of that enigmatic sovereign, Frederick the Great. Each is so contrived as to be, in the march of its events, engrossing fiction and at the same time, in its revelation of the secret springs of conduct, biography in the most profound sense.

THE REDEMPTION OF TYCHO BRAHE. By Max Brod. *Translated from the German by Felix Warren Crosse.*

The ancient story of age's losing contest with youth, of sinking star and rising sun, is told by Max Brod in terms of the intellectual battle between Tycho Brahe, the Danish astronomer, and the great Kepler, in a Bohemian castle where both are guests of the Emperor Rudolph.

THE COUNTERFEITERS. (*Les Faux-Monnayeurs.*) By André Gide, author of *Strait Is the Gate*, etc. *Translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy.*

André Gide, after nearly a generation of pre-eminence in French letters, so strongly feels that he succeeds here in purging the novel of "all those elements which do not specifically belong" to it, that he calls *The Counterfeiters* his "first novel."

THE END OF A WORLD. By Claude Anet, author of *Ariane. Translated from the French by Jeffrey E. Jeffrey.*

A romantic idyll of the failing days of the Crô-Magnon civilization, illustrated from the prehistoric art-works found in the caves of southern France.

UNCLE ANGHEL. By Panaït Istrati, author of *Kyra Kyralina. Translated from the French by Maude Valérie White.*

Three independent stories continuing the "Tales of Adrien Zograffi" begun in *Kyra Kyralina;* the work of a writer whose power and originality have won him the unreserved applause of Romain Rolland and Georg Brandes.

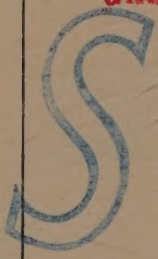
THE PROMISED LAND. By Ladislas Reymont, author of *The Peasants. Translated from the Polish by Michael H. Dziewicki. In two volumes.*

A saga of the industrialization of Poland in the '80's, and a powerful history of spiritual debasement coming in the wake of material prosperity.

BORZOI
BOOKS

[redacted]
Return this book on or before the last date stamped below
[redacted]

This book may be RECALLED before its due date



Leisco Product

BRENTANO'S
Booksellers & Stationers
New York